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The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci

A Diachronic Interpretation of Prison Notebooks

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A Note on the Text

In the following pages the *Notebooks* will be cited according to the sequencing, internal divisions and section numbering used by Antonio Gramsci in *Quaderni del carcere*, critical edition published by the Istituto Gramsci, edited by V. Gerratana, Turin: Einaudi, 1977, 4 volumes (vol. 4, *Critical Apparatus*, will be cited using the abbreviation Q followed by the page number), even where these do not correspond with those of the Edizione Nazionale degli Scritti of Antonio Gramsci, II: *Quaderni del carcere*, critical edition edited by G. Francioni, vol. 1, *Quaderni di traduzioni* (*1929–1932*), edited by G. Cospito and G. Francioni, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2007 (containing: *Notebooks* A [a]–[b]; B [a]–[b]; 9 [a]; C [a]–[d]; 7 [a]; D); vol. 2, *Quaderni miscellanei* (*1929–1935*), currently in preparation (containing: Notebooks 1, 2, 4 [a]–[d], 3, 5, 6, 7 [b]–[c], 8 [a]–[d], 14, 15, 17); vol. 3, *Quaderni speciali* (*1932–1935*), currently in preparation (containing: Notebooks 10, 12, 13, 11, 16, 18–29). The following English translations were used for the quotations: Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, edited with an Introduction by Joseph A. Buttigieg, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, 3 vols. (corresponding to Notebooks 1–8, quoted without any further indications); *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971 (henceforth SPN); *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Derek Boothman, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995 (henceforth FS); *Selections from Cultural Writings*, edited by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985 (henceforth CW); *Letters from Prison*, edited by Frank Rosengarten, translated by Raymond Rosenthal, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 (henceforth LP); *Pre-Prison Writings*, edited by Richard Bellamy, translated by Virginia Cox, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 (henceforth PPW); *Selection from Political Writings*, selected and edited by Quintin Hoare, translated by John Mathews, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977–8, vol. 1 (1910–20) (henceforth SPW I), vol. II (1921–6) (henceforth SPW II); *History, Philosophy and Culture in the Young Gramsci*, edited by Pedro Cavalcanti and Paul Piccone, Saint Louis: Telos Press, 1975 (henceforth HPC). Texts not found in the above-mentioned sources were translated directly from Italian, as were the quotations from the secondary literature, which was not updated with respect to the original edition of this book, published in 2011. Nevertheless, deserving of mention are several books that could not be considered back then but which today represent an essential reference point for several questions dealt with in the present work: P. Thomas, *The Gramscian*

Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism, Leiden: Brill, 2009; L. Rapone, *Cinque anni che paiono secoli. Antonio Gramsci dal socialismo al comunismo* (*1914–1919*), Rome: Carocci, 2011; and G. Vacca, *Vita e pensieri di Antonio Gramsci* (*1926–1937*), Turin: Einaudi, 2012.

PREFACE

Questions of Method

Six decades have passed since the initial publication, partial and topic-oriented, of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, and more than three decades since the chronological edition. At present a new critical text is being prepared of this work for the Edizione Nazionale of his writings. Over this period an endless bibliography on Gramsci has arisen which at present numbers slightly fewer than 20,000 texts (in almost all the world's languages), treating every aspect of Gramscian thought, from his life to his political writings, from his letters to the extraordinary interplay of topics in his prison notebooks.[1] Nevertheless, in recent years many scholars have seen the need for further examination of the notebooks in order to emphasise the diachronic plan of the writings with respect to the sychronic one, Gramsci's open reflections regarding his (never definitive) objectives, and the polysemous concepts and categories adopted for the individual definitions.[2]

Involved here is a (re)reading of the *Notebooks* from the same perspective Gramsci suggested using to study Marx, setting forth several 'Questions of Method' to whomever wished 'to study the birth of a conception of the world which has never been systematically expounded by its founder (*and one furthermore whose essential coherence is to be sought not in each individual writing or series of writings but in the whole development of the multiform intellectual work in which the elements of the conception are implicit*)'. To this end Gramsci underscored that 'some preliminary detailed philological work has to be done. This has to be carried out with the most scrupulous accuracy, scientific honesty and *intellectual loyalty, and without any preconceptions, apriorism or parti pris*', in order 'to reconstruct the process of intellectual development of the thinker in question in order to identify those elements which were to become stable and "permanent" – in other words those which were taken up as the thinker's own thought, distinct from and superior to the "material" which he had studied earlier and which served as a stimulus to him'. Moreover, Gramsci wrote that '*this selection can be made for periods of varying length, determined by intrinsic*

1 Cf. Cammett (ed.) *Bibliografia gramsciana*, available on-line at: http://213.199.9.13/bibliografiagramsci/.

2 An effective means to guide us through Gramsci's conceptual labyrinth is Liguori and Voza (eds.) 2009, which the reader should refer to for all the individual terms mentioned in the present work.

factors and not by external evidence (*though that too can be utilised*), [*which results*] *in a series of "discards"*, that is to say, of partial doctrines and theories for which the thinker may have had a certain sympathy, at certain times, even to the extent of having accepted them provisionally and of having availed himself of them for his work of criticism and of historical and scientific creation'. He also stated that '*these observations are all the more valid the more the thinker in question is endowed with a violent impetus, has a polemical character and is lacking in esprit de système*, or when one is dealing with a personality in whom theoretical and practical activity are indissolubly intertwined and with an intellect in a process of continual creation and perpetual movement, *with a strong and mercilessly vigorous sense of self-criticism* … The search for the *Leitmotiv*, for the rhythm of the thought as it develops, should be more important than that for single casual affirmations and isolated aphorisms'. Gramsci, explicitly referring to Marx's writings, though probably also thinking of his own, emphasised that

> a distinction should further be made within the work of the thinker under consideration between those works which he has carried through to the end *and published himself, or those which remain unpublished, because incomplete, and those which were published by a friend or disciple, but not without revisions, rewritings, cuts, etc., or in other words not without the active intervention of a publisher or editor*. It is clear that the content of posthumous works has to be taken with great discretion and caution, because it cannot be considered definitive but only as material still being elaborated and still provisional. *One should not exclude the possibility that these works, particularly if they have been a long time in the making and if the author never decided to finish them, might have been repudiated or deemed unsatisfactory in whole or in part by the author* … for these works it is as well to have a diplomatic text … or at least a minute description of the original text made according to scientific criteria … Even a study of the correspondence should be carried out with certain precautions: a confident assertion made in a letter would perhaps not be repeated in a book.[3]

The present book falls within this context, which has come to predominate studies on Gramsci in recent years, and its analysis seeks to take advantage

3 Notebook 16, § 2 (SPN, 382–6); except for the expression *Leitmotiv*, the italics are added and indicate the changed or added passages with respect to the first draft of Notebook 4, § 1, where the text in question represents a sort of opening to the 'first series' of the *Notes on Philosophy*.

of the most innovative outcomes of these studies. Therefore, the first part attempts to grasp 'the rhythm of the thought as it develops' with regard to three basic questions at the centre of Gramscian philosophic, political and economic reflections. The first chapter deals with the relationship between structure and superstructure, defined by Gramsci as 'the crucial problem of historical materialism',[4] which nevertheless underwent a process of successive semantic shifts and a gradual erosion, ending up being reformulated from the point of view of the '*Analysis of situations: relations of force*'.[5] The shifting of the focus of the analysis from the theoretical to the practical-operational sphere occurs by means of a deeper look at the concept of *hegemony*, universally viewed as Gramsci's most original contribution to Marx's political theory. The second chapter follows the main stages of this theoretical development, showing how it merges with other fundamental concepts such as class, intellectuals and the party, while also assuming an extremely free and bold 'translation' of the concept of hegemony itself with respect to the original formulation by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Tied to this theoretical context is the analysis of the 'regulated society', which sets forth, on the one hand, a highly critical judgement on the experience of economic planning and, more generally, on the first two decades of history's first socialist state, and on the other an awareness of the validity of the principle of economic planning not only as a response to the great crisis in capitalism in the early 1930s (exemplified by Keynesian policies as well as by fascist corporatism) but also as a key element of modernity itself.

The second part of the book expands the discussion to take in several questions variously linked to those dealt with in the first part, extending the diachronic interpretation of the *Notebooks* by verifying the existence of common elements that tie together apparently heterogeneous topics. These topics have been traced from their first appearance in the prison notes until their last treatment. In particular, the first chapter reconstructs the trends in several conceptual links defined as 'alternative' to the dialectic between structure and superstructure – quantity and quality, content and form, subjective and objective, historical bloc – revealing interesting parallelisms with what has previously been observed: the start of a slow and uncertain reflection, an initial thematisation that has been opened up to debate, and the move to increasingly more open and problematic formulations. The present work has

4 Notebook 4, § 38.

5 This is the title of Notebook 13, § 17 (SPN, 177–85), whose second draft takes up the first part of the above-cited Notebook 4, § 38, in which, moreover, the phrase 'relations of forces' first appears in the *Notebooks*.

thus attempted to verify the existence of similar methods regarding questions which, *prima facie*, appear independent of those analysed in the first part of this book – organic centralism, common sense and/or good sense – concentrating on the apparently minimum variations in Gramsci's rewriting of his notes in the second draft, and then returning, with the theme of civil society, to topics more related to those dealt with at the beginning. Finally, the last chapter seeks to again adopt a diachronic interpretation to reconsider the relationship between Gramsci and Marxian and Marxist tradition: Marx as the 'author of concrete political and historical works' such as the *18th Brumaire*, Engels who, with his *Antidühring*, anticipates in some ways the dogmatism of Soviet Marxism *à la* Bukharin, and Lenin, whose work Gramsci proposed to freely 'translate' using Italian historical language.

The leitmotif of the present study, which seeks to take its place within the philological studies of the *Notebooks* started some thirty years ago by Gianni Francioni, is a reconstruction, through an analysis of individual topics, of Gramsci's gradual development of a philosophy of praxis capable of going beyond the aporias and dogmatisms of Marxism-Leninism, while also providing instruments for analysing the crisis of contemporary society, a reality in which 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born'.[6]

This work will consider those who have previously emphasised 'the great danger in isolating only one aspect of the activity of those thinkers who have not had the chance, or better yet, to whom the chance has not been granted, to properly organise their work, to symmetrically align all its facets and analyse it from the point of view of a scientific or humanistic discipline. An isolation of this kind can, and must, lead to a lessening of the value of that which is isolated; or at least to an insufficiently broad understanding and interpretation of it'. The present work runs this risk in more than a few places; nevertheless, aware along with others 'of this danger …, we have perservered, also because it is not possible to shed light on and interpret all of Gramsci's complex work with equal attention'.[7] As a result of this awareness this book shall, at least in the first instance, leave aside the contributions, important though they may be, of critiques of the individual topics, preferring instead to go directly to Gramsci's texts, in line with another of his warnings against '*Importuning the texts*', which occurs 'when out of zealous attachment to a thesis, one makes texts say more than they really do'.[8]

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6 Notebook 3, § 34.

7 Stipčević 1981, p. 183.

8 Notebook 6, § 198. Regarding the metaphoric value of this expression, which Gramsci himself states is valid 'also outside of philology', cf. below, Part 1, Chapter 3, § 2.

The following pages are the result of more than twenty years of studies on Gramsci, during which the author has benefitted from suggestions and advice from such a large number of teachers and friends as to make it impossible to list them individually, thereby running the risk of forgetting someone. It is proper here to remember them collectively, with a special heartfelt thanks to Gianni Francioni and Giuseppe Vacca, without whose help this work would not have been possible. Obviously the author accepts responsibility for the entire content of the book, whose English edition has been made possible thanks to the kind interest of Peter Thomas, whom I would like to thank publicly. The book is dedicated to the memory of Flavio Baroncelli and Edoardo Sanguineti.

PART 1

Philosophy – Politics – Economics

CHAPTER 1

Structure and Superstructures

1 Working Hypothesis

'Relations between structure and superstructures. This is the crucial problem of historical materialism, in my view',[1] Gramsci notes in the 'First Series' of his *Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism*. For this reason this 'problem' will be examined as an example of the evolution in the author's thinking; as one of the most famous Gramsci scholars has observed, 'Gramsci's entire work indicates, in fact develops as a leitmotif, the strong intersecting of structure and superstructure'.[2] In order to grasp the evolution in Gramsci's thinking on this and other topics, a certain number of notes shall be examined that appear particularly significant; these will be placed in succession based on the chronology of the Notebooks as established by Gianni Francioni, which in part clarify and in part modify Valetino Gerratana's proposals.[3] Aware of the risks and the faulty conclusions any attempt at schematisation entails, several 'working hypotheses' are proposed, to be subject to verification from Gramsci's text.

a) During his six years of work while incarcerated, the problem of the relation between structure and superstructures, as well as most (if not all) of the 'crucial problems' of Gramscian thought, underwent a complex and non-linear evolution: a slow and difficult genesis (1929–30), an initial ordering (autumn of 1930), some successive uncertainties (late 1930 to late 1931), which was a prelude to a turning point (early 1932), and further deepening of thought (mid-1932 to mid-1935), as also evidenced by the changes in the parallel transcriptions of the notes from the previous phases.[4] These changes,

1 Notebook 4, § 38; Gramsci's italics indicate the title of the note.

2 Spriano 1977, p. 74.

3 Cf. Francioni 1984, pp. 140–6, with subsequent corrections and additions, regarding which see, in particular, Francioni 1992b, pp. 85–186; *Nota al testo*, in Gramsci 2007, pp. 835–98; *Come lavorava Gramsci* and introductory notes in Gramsci 2009a. Several additional clarifications regarding the datings of several of the notebooks are proposed below. Gerratana's chronological indications are instead contained in Q, 2367–442.

4 It must of course be noted that, 'in the second phase of the *Notebooks* (1931–1933), and even more so in the third phase (1934–35), Gramsci … erased (with large pen strokes that do not hide the text) many of the notes from the first draft, only to then reuse them almost always,

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as already noted, 'represent the original expression of the theoretical and historical-political developments then under way, and of Gramsci's rethinking in this regard … This microcosm of changes reflect significant thoughts in the "mind" of Gramsci in the first half of the 1930s'.[5]

b) In the case of the structure-superstructure dialectic, this evolution shifts to a phase in which the question is not explicitly thematised (initial miscellaneous notes); however, in his historical-political analysis Gramsci seems to implicitly share, at least in part, the deterministic and mechanistic viewpoint of the then dominant reality in international Marxism, which, in pursuing his inquiries, he would attribute (stigmatising it) to Bukharin. There is an attempt in his initial *Notes on Philosophy* (Notebook 4) at systematisation, which views the problem in terms of equidistance and the struggle of opposite extremes: deterministic mechanicism and idealistic voluntarism. As it was not definitive, this approach was questioned beginning in the 'Second Series' of the *Notes on Philosophy* (Notebook 7), which almost exclusively deals with refuting Bukharin's positions, and even more so in the 'third series' (Notebook 8), where even the terms themselves regarding the issue are questioned: in fact the architectural metaphor of a foundation on which a building is constructed is inevitably destined to become devoid of meaning at the moment a rigidly univocal causal nexus between the two elements is rejected. Nevertheless, Gramsci continued to deal with the problem in the second part of his incarceration, in particular in Notebooks 10 and 11 (entitled *The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce* and *Notes for an Introduction and Undertaking of a Study of Philosophy and of Cultural History*, respectively) and in the new miscellaneous Notebooks 14, 15 and 17 (made up almost exclusively of B texts; that is, notes from a single draft), which he worked on while his strength permitted, trying out original and non-definitive solutions for what in the meantime had become the problem of 'how … the historical movement is born'. At the same time he continued to transcribe the old notes in the 'special notebooks', a task that was ever more difficult due to his precarious health[6] and the growing distance between old and new formulations.

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with greater or lesser modification, in other notes … For greater clarity, and to avoid excessive repetition, *first drafts* are indicated as *A texts*, *B texts* are notes of which only *one version exists*; and *C texts* are the *second versions of A texts*' (Gerratana, *Q*, XXXVI).

5 'La fabbrica dei Quaderni (Gramsci e Vico)', in Ciliberto 1982, p. 263. As Matt 2008 emphasises, p. 793, 'still today the study of the linguistic-stylistic structure of Gramsci's prose is completely neglected', which naturally should include the analysis of the changes to and other text-related peculiarities of the *Notebooks*.

6 Fabio Frosini has dealt with the close connection between Gramsci's health and his prison

c) This course, while definitively distancing Gramsci from the Marxist-Leninist *diamat*, involved, on the other hand, a deeper investigation of Marx and Lenin's historical work, which was schematised in terms of a shift from the letter to the spirit of the texts of the two fathers of historical materialism, as well as of a clear differentiation between their positions and those of their successors (Engels and Stalin, respectively).[7] This is the context in which to view the recovery by Gramsci of some youthful inspiration, purged of the idealistic heritage of one who was well aware of being at that time 'tendentially somewhat Crocean'.[8] In any event, at the end of his reflections on the relation between structure and superstructure, Gramsci appears to anticipate the ideas of subsequent scholars, who hypothesised that 'the famous "superstructure" was nothing more than a metaphor for Marx, used with stylistic discretion on only a few occasions, and most of the time replaced by other metaphors, or better yet by *theoretical explanations* … A good deal of the "determinism" and "schematism" that bourgeoise theorists like to hold against Marx derives from this confusion [between metaphors and theoretical explanations], which regrettably was spread by Marxists'.[9] Similarly, Gramsci, despite his strong centralism, only uses the structure-superstructure dialectic as a heading six times in the *Notebooks*, and over a limited period of his prison reflections (around a year and a half, between mid-1930 and the end of 1931, out of a total of six years).[10]

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activities in Frosini 2003, pp. 23–74; on the indissoluble link between intellectual and political biography and theoretical reflections from prison, see Rossi and Vacca 2007.

7 This question will be taken up below: regarding the gradual distancing between Marx and Engels, see below, Part 2, Chapter 6, § 2; regarding the (implicit) criticism of Stalinism in the *Notebooks*, see instead Part 1, Ch. 3 and the bibliography therein provided.

8 Notebook 10, I, § 11 (FS, 355); note, moreover, how on the same page Gramsci upholds the validity of his position in his youth, emphasising its '… maturity and capacity', while at the same time admitting its limits and thus the opportunity at that later moment in time to 'consider afresh the position and [put it] forward in a critically more developed form'.

9 Silva 1973, pp. 50 and 56. In a similar vein see Finelli, who believes a thorough redefinition of the concept of the mode of production would allow 'the mature Marx to abandon … the extrinsic and mechanistic model of structure and superstructure' (Finelli 1991, pp. 114 ff.). An interpretation that rejects any form of essentialism and reductionism, materialistic or idealistic, and any form of determination, even in the final instance, thereby presenting the original Althusserian concept of overdetermination and combining it with several other 'heterodox' interpretations of Marx, among which Gramsci's, can be found in several exponents of the so-called U.S. analytical Marxism: see, for example, Resnick and Wolff 1987, in particular Chapter 1.

10 This specifically involves three notes from Notebook 4 (§§ 12, 38 and 45), all of which would

Nevertheless, a long history preceded and followed this phase, which this book will try to reconstruct, as much as possible through Gramsci's own words and through the evidence from 'the rhythm of the thought as it develops'.

2 The 'Bukharinian' Phase (from the Party School to Notebook 4, §§ 12 and 15: 1925–30)

Absent from the first, concise four-point programme of work drafted on 19 March 1927, in a letter to his sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht ('(1) a study of the formation of the public spirit in Italy during the past century; in other words, a study of Italian intellectuals … (2) A study of comparative linguistics […] (3) A study of Pirandello's theater … (4) An essay on the serial novel and popular taste in literature'),[11] the reflections on historical materialism represent, even though in the elliptical formulation of 'Theory of history and of historiography', the first point in the more detailed list of 'Main topics' that introduces the 'First Notebook', to which Gramsci assigned the date of 8 February 1929.[12]

undergo a second draft; two from Notebook 7 (§§ 10 and 24), only one of which would appear in the C text; and one from Notebook 8 (§ 182), which remains as a B text. This merely quantitative consideration suffices to give the idea of Gramsci's gradual movement away from viewing 'the crucial problem of historical materialism' in these terms (the more so since, even in the texts from the second draft, the heading structure-superstructure no longer appears), which obviously does not exclude the author from using the two concepts, in a weak and/or polemical sense, in the subsequent part of the *Notebooks*; on the contrary, he can do so more easily since he has gone beyond a 'strong' acceptance and can now turn this against his ideal interlocutors, for example, the Crocean De Ruggiero in Notebook 8, § 231 (entitled *Introduction to the study of philosophy. The relation between structure and superstructure*, which appears along with others in Notebook 10, II, § 31; FS, 383–9). The same could be said for the criticism of the Crocean dichotomy structure-poetry in the *Divine Comedy*, which, 'liquidated' in the notes on Canto 10 of the Inferno, takes on again a polemical tone, for example in Notebook 6 (cf. below Part 2, Chapter 4, § 2).

11 LP I, 82–5.

12 Similar considerations can be found in a new letter to Tania, dated the following March 25th, in which 'the theory of history and historiography' represents the second of three subjects regarding which Gramsci has 'decided to concern [himself] chiefly and take notes' (LP I, 256–9).

The actual writing of the notes – at first miscellaneous and bibliographical in nature, without forgetting the parallel translation from German and Russian[13] – would not, however, begin until the following June. The initial *Notes on Philosophy* date instead to May 1930, more than a year later. Moreover, a few months earlier there occurred what was defined as 'a sort of "explosion" in the reflections more directly concerning political theory', in §§ 43 and 44 of Notebook 1, written between February and March,[14] when the groundwork was laid for the entire subsequent prison writings. Therefore, one can begin here to examine Gramsci's implicit conception of the problem of the relation between structure and superstructure during the first phase of his reflections for the *Notebooks*. Of particular consideration here is the beginning of § 44:

> The whole problem of the various political currents of the Risorgimento, of their reciprocal relations, and of their relations with the homogeneous or subordinate forces of the various historical sections (or sectors) of national territory is reducible to the following basic fact: that the Moderates represented a relatively homogeneous class, and therefore their leadership underwent relatively limited oscillations, whereas the Action Party did not found itself specifically upon any historical class, and the oscillations which its leading organs underwent resolves itself, in the final analysis, according to the interests of the Moderates.

Here the structure appears to generate, at least mechanically, the corresponding superstructure; in fact, a few lines later Gramsci speaks of an historical turning point which is '"normal", given the structure and the function of the classes which the Moderates represented'; and further on of the fact that 'if a Jacobin

13 On the close link between the translations and the theoretical work while in prison, see the present author's introduction to Gramsci 2007, pp. 15–28. It is sufficient to note here that the elliptical style of the *Theory of history* is the same as that adopted by Gramsci in Notebook 7 in coming up with the title of the *Manifesto del partito comunista* (cf. ibid., pp. 26, 748 and 817). Moreover, as proof of the difficulties surrounding the appearance of the *Notebooks*, the initial lines following the above-quoted programme of work represent the few that were cancelled by Gramsci so as to be illegible (cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 2369).

14 Francioni 1987, p. 30. To realise the extent of this 'explosion' (in regard to which see also Burgio 2003, pp. 34–40), one should consider that during these two months Gramsci wrote almost triple the amount of notes compared to his first year of prison writing: 100 notes comprising over 62 manuscript pages compared to 42 notes over 20 pages until that time. However, only beginning in 1931 would the ratio between the quantity of theoretical work and that of the translations turn in favour of the former, ending in his definitively abandoning the latter the following year.

party did not arise in Italy, the reasons should be sought in the economic field'.[15] In the preceding § 43 he notes with regard to the nineteenth-century uprisings the 'relative synchronism' that 'shows the existence of a [relatively] homogeneous political-economic structure'. In his historical-political analysis, in which he even introduces for the first time the fundamental concept of *hegemony* (which the following chapter will deal with fully) Gramsci thus appears again to use, more or less consciously, schema taken from the Marxist *vulgate*, which at that time could be represented by Bukharin. In fact, as observed above regarding Notebook 1 – further examples of which will be omitted – 'one cannot help but be struck by the curious similarity of the terminology and content' to the work of the Soviet theorist.[16]

Moreover, the start of his prison reflections must of necessity draw on the (forced) conclusion to his pre-arrest political-theoretical activity. Among the vast evidence in this regard, it suffices to recall that in 1925 Gramsci, then Italian Communist Party secretary, had produced several handouts for the

15 To give an idea of Gramsci's evolution on this point, and anticipating subsequent events, in Notebook 15, § 11 (SPN, 108–11, March–April 1933) he wrote, taking up again the Cavour-Mazzini comparison that 'whereas Cavour was aware of his role (as least up to a certain point) in as much as he understood the role of Mazzini, the latter does not seem to have been aware either of his own or of Cavour's. If, on the contrary, Mazzini had possessed such awareness – in other words, if he had been a realistic politician and not a visionary apostle (i.e., if he had not been Mazzini) – then the equilibrium which resulted from the convergence of the two men's activities would have been different, would have been more favourable to Mazzinianism'. Thus the outcome of the Risorgimento was not determined solely by the 'objective' element but, even if not above all, by the 'subjective' one, contrary to what Gramsci stated three years earlier. Moreover, while the analysis in Notebook 1 was based on *The Holy Family*, that in Notebook 15 refers to *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which, up until Notebook 4, § 38 (transcribed in Notebook 13, § 18; SPN, 158–67), Gramsci had defined as an essential moment in the development of the philosophy of praxis: this 'can be seen as the applications and development of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, whereas *The Holy Family* is an intermediate and still vague phase' (which takes nothing away from the fact it is 'the work by Marx and Engels most frequently quoted in the *Notebooks*', as Cassani states (Cassani 1991, p. 72)). Thus the comparison between Gramsci and Marx is never acritical but always dialectical, involving a hierarchy of values contained within Marx's work itself, which in the meantime Gramsci had time to rethink even during his translations. On the 'return of Marx' in the *Notebooks*, see Izzo 2009, pp. 23–74.

16 Buci-Glucksmann 1976, p. 308. Though dated and not entirely embraceable in those aspects regarding Althusser's theses, this work is still thought-provoking as well as valuable in that it represents one of the very first attempts at a genetic and diachronic interpretation of Gramscian categories, based on the chronological edition of the *Notebooks* being prepared for publication at that time (the French original appeared in 1975).

party school. In the introduction to the first handout he wrote that 'the first part … will follow – or simply give a translation of – comrade Bukharin's book in the theory of historical materialism';[17] that is, the *Manuale* which would subsequently be denigrated.[18] There are, moreover, many instances in 1925–6 of Gramsci's political-theoretical considerations that reveal concessions to an 'economism' that would lead him, for example, to prophetise, only several weeks before the complete and definitive emergence of fascist totalitarianism – whose initial actions would include the arrest of Gramsci and other communist leaders – the possible fall of Mussolini in virtue of 'a sudden, lightning economic crisis [that] could bring the democratic republican coalition to power'.[19]

The criticism of Bukharin's *Popular Essay* began with Notebook 1, §153, written at the end of May 1930. Among other things, Gramsci limits himself

17 Gramsci, *Introduction to the First Course of the Party School* (SPW II, 291–2). A reading of the handouts not only sheds new light on Gramsci's response to Bukharin's text, something which several scholars have focused on, but reveals a rather rigid stance by Gramsci on Marxism in that period: see, in this regard, Del Roio 2004, in particular pp. 54–7. It should also be kept in mind that 'in the spring of 1924 Gramsci, upon being elected as deputy, had his first experience with the party school', for which, according to Giulio Cerreti, 'we used for textbooks several copies of the *ABC of Communism* by Nicola Bukarin and the economic treatise by Lapidus' (quoted in Lussana 2008, p. 898), another person Gramsci would target for his criticisms of Soviet Marxism-Leninism (cf. below Chapter 3).

18 As Gerratana (*Q, 2539*) states, this refers to 'the book entitled *Teorija istoriceskogo materializma. Populjarnyj ucebnik marksistkoj sociologii* [The Theory of Historical Materialism. Popular Manual of Sociology]', 'published for the first time in Moscow in 1921 … Gramsci in all likelihood had read this manual, in the original or translated, in 1922–3 during a trip to the Soviet Union'. Upon beginning to write the prison notes he asked his sister-in-law to send him 'the French translation of the book … Although this book was not found among the prison books, there is no doubt Gramsci received it in Turin', despite the fact more than one person has tried, rather unconvincingly, to demonstrate otherwise. See, for example, Mastroianni 1992, pp. 489–98, as well as the reply in Francioni 1992, pp. 607 ff., based on Vittoria 1992, p. 189.

19 Gramsci, *A Study of the Italian Situation* (PPW, 288–300). It should be kept in mind that, further on in the same text, written by Gramsci as a report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party on 2–3 August 1926, one also finds the contrary observation, amply developed in the *Notebooks*, according to which 'in the advanced capitalist countries, the ruling class possesses political and organisational resources that it did not possess, for example, in Russia. This means that even the most serious economic crises do not have immediate repercussions in the political sphere. Politics is always one step behind – or many steps behind – economics', at least in 'the most important capitalist States', while 'in typical peripheral States, like Italy, Poland, Spain or Portugal, the State forces are less efficient'.

to pointing out 'the logical errors'. In Notebook 4 § 9 (one of the initial *Notes on Philosophy*), written in the same period, Gramsci proposes writing *A Repertory of Marxism*, a heading that, significantly, would disappear in the *Notebooks* as the author slowly realised that Marxism was not a doctrine that could be reduced to formulas and schema, even didascalic in aim, as Bukharin in fact had attempted and as Gramsci had explicitly noted starting with Notebook 7, § 29 (February 1931), recopied in full in Notebook 11, § 22 (SPN, 431–6). However, in Notebook 4, § 12 (May–August 1930), the first note bearing the title *Structure and Superstructure*, Gramsci, despite stating that 'the meaning of the concept of structure and of superstructure … must be clearly established', appears to lose his way in questions such as:

> Are libraries structure or superstructure? And what about the testing laboratories of scientists? Or the musical instruments of an orchestra? … One cannot deny that a certain relationship does exist, but it is not direct or immediate. In reality, certain forms of technical instruments have a dual phenomenology: they are both structure and superstructure … Certain superstructures have a 'material structure' but retain the character of superstructure, their development is not 'immanent' in their particular 'material structure' but in the 'material structure' of society. A class is formed on the basis of its function in the world of production: the growth of power, the struggle for power, and the struggle to preserve power creates the superstructures that determine the formation of a 'special material structure' for the diffusion, etc., of those same superstructures. Scientific thought is a superstructure that creates 'the scientific instruments'; music is a superstructure that creates the musical instruments. Logically as well as chronologically there are: social structure – superstructure – material structure of the superstructure.

That such a thesis is still close to that of Bukharin's is evident not only from a comparison with passages from the *Manual* substantially similar in tone,[20] but

20 Cf. Bukharin 1977, pp. 168, 300–2, etc. The similarities between the two positions have already been noted by Prestipino 1987, p. 256, who also observed that 'fate of having to impersonate vulgar Marxism wasn't entirely merited' by the Soviet theorist, who for Gramsci often took on the nature of a symbol, an object more polemical than real. Nevertheless, as Gerratana observed in the *Presentazione* of the above-cited Italian translation of Bukharin's *Manual* (pp. XIII–XIV), there is nothing in that text 'that can disturb the conceptual nucleus of Stalin's "Marxism" and of Stalinist culture, while there is much that could contribute as an element of enrichment'.

also from Gramsci's self-critical statements in the corresponding C text (Notebook 11, § 29; SPN, 457–8); here not only is the conceptualisation of the problem of the relationship between structure and superstructure in mechanistic terms explicitly attributed to Bukharin, but it is noted that:

> This way of treating the question just makes matters uselessly complicated … There is no doubt that all this is just an infantile deviation of the philosophy of praxis generated by the baroque conviction that the more one goes back to 'material' objects the more orthodox one must be.

A certain schematism emerges again in § 15 of Notebook 4, where, after recalling that 'it is not ideologies that create social reality, but social reality, in its productive structure, that creates ideologies' (which, moreover, does not justify the Crocean interpretation according to which, in Marxism, 'the "superstructures" were an appearance or illusion'), Gramsci draws our attention to the Sorelian concept of 'historical bloc'[21] by stating that:

> If humans become conscious of their task on the terrain of superstructures, it means that there is a necessary and vital connection between structure and superstructures, just as there is between the skin and the skeleton in the human body … (The comparison with the human body may serve as an apt metaphor to give these concepts a popular formulation).

It will be seen below that this metaphor as well, which is dear to Lenin among others and is used by Gramsci also in the contemporary Notebook 3, § 56, will be refuted.

21 'It is thus true that the concept of historical bloc was taken by Gramsci from Sorel', claims Badaloni 1975, p. 60. Nevertheless, as Gervasoni 2008, pp. 720 ff., argues, 'this is a case of erroneous interpretation, since this concept is completely absent from the French writer's works', to which, according to Gerratana, Gramsci attributes the concept based on a work by Giovanni Malagodi on ideologies; in any event '*this is a mistake that conceals an interpretation*', since it attributes to Sorel, in addition to Hegelian idealism, the merit of having understood the decisive value of ideologies ('myth') in determining historical events.

3 The 'Centrist' Thesis from the End of 1930 (Notebook 4, § 38)

With respect to the texts quoted above, a step forward was achieved by the first, short-lived resolution of the question regarding *'Relations between structure and superstructures'* found in the above-mentioned note from Notebook 4, § 38, dating back to October 1930; it is no coincidence this is the longest note of the entire notebook (cc. 67*r*–74*v* of the manuscript), which would be finished, at least as regards the section entitled *Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism. First Series*, by November. This signifies that the text analysed here represents 'a point of arrival for the work in 1930',[22] and the maximum conceptualisation of the problem achieved in the *Notes on Philosophy I*, which includes several statements that would regularly be repeated throughout his reflections, together with others (more numerous) which were destined sooner or later to be modified (strengthened or weakened) or even eliminated and replaced by others opposite in tone. Moreover, these pages already allow a good number of general observations to be made on the development of Gramsci's prison activities.

In this text he thus tries for the first time to deal systematically with what he sees as 'the crucial problem of historical materialism', above all by providing:

> A basis for finding one's bearings: (1) the principle that 'no society sets itself tasks for the accomplishment of which the necessary and sufficient conditions do not already exist' (or are not in the course of emerging and developing), and (2) that 'no society perishes until it has first developed all the forms of life implicit in its internal relations'.

The passage concludes with the intention of 'checking the exact wording of these principles': in fact, as Gerratana mentions, the passages, taken from the 1859 Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*, 'are cited here from memory: added to the corresponding C text is the literal translation of the entire passage' undertaken by Gramsci himself,[23] but always in inverse order to what is presented by Marx.[24] These passages were the basis for the economistic interpretation

22 Francioni 1984, p. 183.

23 *Q*, 2642; for Gramsci's version, provided in Notebook 7, see the above-cited Gramsci 2007, p. 747.

24 It has already been observed that the translation of these passages represents 'in reality one possible interpretation'; in particular, 'Gramsci inverts the order of Marx's two laws so that the prevalently positive one precedes the other' (Badaloni 1977, pp. 23ff.). For a

of Marxism that largely dominated the Second International and the very same deterministic interpretation of the structure-superstructure link, given that, a bit earlier, Marx himself summarised the 'guiding principle' of his theory as follows:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.[25]

It is significant that, in the *Marxist-Leninist Anthology* in the first handout of the party school, this passage from the *Preface* to the *Critique of Political Economy* only contains its 'deterministic' part,[26] without any mention of those 'two principles' in the *Notebooks* that constitute the focus of the Gramscian interpretation of historical materialism.[27] Gramsci would, in fact, return to these principles several times during his prison reflections, gradually moving away from their traditional interpretation, even using them to counter this interpretation:

a) In Notebook 7, § 20 (end of 1930–February 1931), where he criticised Bukharin because 'the fundamental issue is not dealt with: how does the historical movement arise out the structures? Yet this is the crucial point of the whole question of historical materialism'. Therefore, after again citing Marx's 'two propositions' he adds they 'should have been analyzed so as to bring forth their full significance and all their implications. Only on these grounds can all materialistic views and every trace of superstitious belief of "miracles" be eliminated';

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more general discussion of the relationship between Gramsci and the Marxian sources regarding this issue, see Frosini 2003, pp. 86–95.

25 Marx 1987, pp. 262 ff. (translated by Gramsci in Notebook 7: cf. Gramsci 2007, p. 746).

26 Cf. Gramsci 1988, pp. 122 ff.

27 This had already been noted in Gerratana 1977, p. 93.

b) In Notebook 8, § 195 (February 1932) putting forth '*the proposition that "society does not set itself problems for whose solution the material preconditions do not already exist"*. This proposition immediately raises the problem of the formation of a collective will. In analysing critically what the proposition means, it is important to study how permanent collective wills are in fact formed';[28]
c) In Notebook 10, II, § 6 (May 1932; SPN, 366–7): Marx's two well-known principles are defined as 'the two points between which … oscillates' the process of 'catharsis', a term now employed by Gramsci 'to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is, the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from "objective to subjective" and from "necessity to freedom". Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the "cathartic" moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis, and the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses which have resulted from the evolution of the dialectic';
d) In Notebook 11, § 29 (July–August 1932; SPN 458–61), the second draft of Notebook 4, § 12, where Gramsci criticises Bukharin for not citing 'the Preface to *Zur Kritik*', defined as 'the most important authentic source for a reconstruction of the philosophy of praxis';
e) In Notebook 15, § 17 (April–May 1933; SPN, 106–8): the propositions in the 1859 *Preface* are again defined as 'the two fundamental principles of political science'; nevertheless 'it goes without saying that these principles must first be developed critically in all their implications, and purged of every residue of mechanicism and fatalism'. This last expression recalls that used by Gramsci sixteen years earlier in his famous article 'The Revolution Against *Capital*', with regard to 'the real, undying Marxist thought … which, in Marx, was contaminated by positivist and naturalist incrustations'.[29] However, more important is the fact that at the moment he introduces, through continuous adjustments, substantial changes to his previous thinking, Gramsci still feels the need to refer back 'rigorously' to Marx (as he writes in the note above),

28 Already in Notebook 7, § 4 (November 1930) Gramsci had written: 'In my view, the scientific foundations for a morality of historical materialism should be sought in the assertion that "society does not set itself tasks unless the conditions for their succesful completion already exist"'.

29 This can now be found in PPW, 39–42.

> whose thinking 'contains in a nutshell the ethico-political aspect of politics or theory of hegemony and consent, as well as the aspect of force and of economics'.[30]

Returning to Notebook 4, § 38, Gramsci states:

> A frequent error in historical analysis consists in the inability to find the relation between the 'permanent' and the 'occasional'; as a result, remote causes are presented as if they were the direct causes, or else direct causes are said to be only the efficient causes. On the one hand, there is an excess of 'economism', and on the other an excess of 'ideologism'; one side overrates mechanical causes, and the other overrates the 'voluntary' and individual element. The dialectical nexus between the two types of inquiry is not established precisely.

This passage should be compared with the immediately preceding note (§ 37), in which '"*historical materialism*"',[31] 'with the whole ensemble of the philosophical theory of the value of ideological superstructures', is contrasted with both 'materialistic "monism"' and 'idealistic' monism, returning to a schema already presented in Notebook 3, § 31 (June–July 1930), in which the extremes were represented by the 'vulgar materialism' of Plekhanov and the 'opportunistic' Kantianism of Otto Bauer, respectively, in addition to being implicit in the subheadings to all the *Notes on Philosophy*: 'Materialism and Idealism', which, moreover, were clearly inspired by Engels and Lenin.[32] By schematising we can place Gramsci at the centre of an (ideal) alignment between two opposing extremes, with a non-coincidental similarity to the (dramatically real) positions existing in the struggle inside the CPSU between, on the one hand, the Stalinist 'centre' and the mechanicism of Bukharin (which tends to soften Marxism in the direction of positivist scientism), and on the other Deborin's (Hegelian-Marxist) 'idealism', which was taking shape during those same months (end of 1930–beginning of 1931; January of that year witnessed the official condemna-

30 Notebook 10, II, § 41.X (August–December 1932; FS, 399–401). On Marx's, as well as Lenin's, influence on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, see below, Chapter 2, in particular § 6.

31 The inverted commas and italics are Gramsci's.

32 It is well-known that Lenin attributed to Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach* the idea of the 'root distinction between the "two great camps" into which the philosophers of the "various schools" were divided … and he directly charges with "confusion" those who use the terms idealism and materialism in any other way' (Lenin 1908, p. 103).

tion of the two 'deviations' by the Central Committee of the CPSU).[33] It should nevertheless be noted that while Stalin would very soon thereafter abandon the 'weapon of criticisms' in favour of the 'criticism of weapons', Gramsci, who until his 'famous' letter of 1926 had shared the basic political strategies of the Soviet leader[34] in substance, even if not in method, would in turn move beyond this stance to launch his arrows (with the exception of a pair of vague references to the Austro-Marxist Max Adler and 'Prof. Lukács')[35,36] exclusively at the mechanist 'deviation', beginning in the second part of the section presently being examined.[37]

Such an asymmetry is explained by several external factors – the rigidity, even theoretical, of Soviet Marxism following the formulation of the doctrine of 'social fascism' and consequent 'shift left' of the CPI (about which Gramsci expressed his disapproval when visited by his brother Gennaro) – as well as

33 Cf. once again in this regard Buci-Glucksmann 1976, pp. 245–50.

34 Regarding the entire, hotly debated question see the reconstruction edited by C. Daniele, with an essay by G. Vacca, in Daniele 1999, as well as the recent reinterpretation in the above-cited Rossi and Vacca 2007, in addition to Pons 2008, pp. 403–29.

35 Max Adler was mentioned in Notebook 4, § 3 as the person who 'combined' historical materialism with 'idealist currents such as Kantianism'; a bit further on, in § 30, he was confused with the 'Viennese doctor, former follower and then adversary of Freud' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2639). None of this stopped various critics from seeing similarities between Gramsci's 'Italian Marxism' and Adler's Austro-Marxism; for a critical appraisal of the question, see Maccaroni 1993, pp. 163 ff.

36 'Lukács (whose theories I only know very vaguely), I believe, asserts that one can speak of the dialectic only with regard to human history and not with regard to nature. He might be wrong and he might be right … I think that Lukács, displeased with the theories of the *Popular Manual*, may have fallen into the opposite error' (Notebook 4, § 43). It is significant in itself that, unlike other cases where Gramsci revealed imprecision or uncertainty, Lukács's indecision, as well as Adler's, is not clarified in the second draft of the texts (Notebook 11, §§ 34 and 66, respectively: SPN, 446; FS, 449–54), which is practically unchanged from the first draft. Evidently Gramsci's interest is elsewhere, which does not exclude the possibility of drawing interesting analogies between two authors who have in common a 'heterodox' interpretation of the Marxism-Leninism of their era (cf. in this regard Prestipino 2002).

37 On the contrary, the first three notebooks present clear critical stances against the 'idealistic deviation' of Marxism: cf., for example, Notebook 1, § 151 (May 1930), where Gramsci notes that it 'is strange that some Marxists believe "rationality" to be superior to "politics", ideological abstraction superior to economic concreteness', adding that 'modern philosophical idealism should be explained on the basis of these historical relations'; it is significant that these expressions are not found in the corresponding C text of Notebook 10, II, § 61 (February or February–May 1933).

more profound prison reflections. Moreover, even his comrades from the 'Turi group' would accuse him, after he had expressed his stance on the question, of having become a social democrat and Crocean, to the point he broke off the discussion.[38]

'Another aspect of the same problem' – continues § 38 of Notebook 4 – 'is the question of the relations of forces'. According to Gramsci:

> One must distinguish various moments or levels, of which three fundamental ones, I think, can be singled out: 1. There is a relation of social forces that is closely linked to the structure; this is an objective relation, a 'naturalistic' fact that can be measured within the systems of the exact or mathematical sciences.[39] … 2. A subsequent moment is the political 'relation of forces': that is, the assessment on the degree of homogeneity and self-consciousness attained by the various social groups. This 'moment', in turn, can itself be divided into various moments corresponding to the different levels of political consciousness as they have manifested themselves in history up to now … 3. The third moment is that of the 'relation of military forces', which from time to time is immediately decisive. Historical development oscillates continually between the first and the third moment.

Continuing to anticipate several subsequent developments, Gramsci, in Notebook 15, § 17 (SPN, 106–8), deems it necessary, again turning his initial conception upside down, to place 'the greatest possible stress on the second moment (equilibrium of political forces), and especially on the third moment (politico-military equilibrium)'. Returning to Notebook 4, § 38, Gramsci states:

> Another question connected with the problem discussed under this rubric is the following: whether fundamental historical events are deter-

38 This whole event was recently the subject of a reinterpretation by Rossi and Vacca 2007, pp. 25–9 and 104 ff.; however, Angelo Rossi tends to exclude the true expulsion of Gramsci by the communist group at Turi (Rossi 2010, pp. 121 ff.). The chronological and logical nexus between prison conversations and Gramsci's theoretical reflections had already been treated by Buci-Glucksmann 1976, pp. 139 and 286.

39 Note once again the literal correspondence between Gramsci's statements in this text and Marx's preface (quoted several times above) to *A Critique of Political Economy*, which speaks of 'the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science' (in Marx 1987, p. 263, translated by Gramsci in Notebook 7, now found in Gramsci 2007, p. 746).

> mined by economic malaise or by economic prosperity. It seems to me that a close analysis of European and world history forbids any peremptory answer to this question along these lines; instead, it should lead one closer to a somewhat general answer,

without questioning 'the priority of the politico-economic fact – that is, the "structure" – as a point of reference and as a nonmechanical dialectical "causation" of the superstructures', as he wrote a bit further on in § 56 of Notebook 4 (November 1930). It is for this reason, and contrary to what he will affirm further on, that Gramsci (Notebook 4, § 38) now claims that political action and measures represent 'an expression, and even the effective expression of economy'. Moreover, after referring to *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 'which contains fundamental statements concerning the relationship between the structure and the superstructures', he recalls

> Engels's statement (in the two letters on historical materialism that have also been published in Italian),[40] … directly connected to the well-known passage in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, that it is on the terrain of ideologies that men 'become conscious' of the conflict between form and content in the world of production.

The 'rubric' *Structure and superstructures* appears again in § 45 of Notebook 4, which, however, contains nothing new in terms of the previous § 38; instead, returning to several concepts already outlined in the previously cited § 37, Gramsci reaffirms 'that historical materialism conceives of itself as a transitory phase in philosophical thought' since, similar to other ideologies,

> [it] is an expression of historical contradictions; indeed, it is the perfect, complete expression of such contradictions, the espression of necessity and not of freedom, which does not and cannot exist. However, if it is demonstrated that contradictions will disappear, then it is implicitly demonstrated that historical materialism, too, will disappear and that the realm of necessity will give way to the realm of freedom, that is, to

40 As Gerratana points out (*Q*, 2638), 'this deals with two letters published in 1895 by the "Sozialistische Akademiker", addressed to Joseph Bloch on 21 September 1890, and to Heinz Starkenburg on 25 January 1894, respectively' and contained 'in volume IV of the Works of Marx-Engels-Lassalle', which Gramsci got hold of in prison. Moreover, the expression is also found elsewhere in Engels's writings, starting with *Anti-Dühring*.

> a period in which 'thought' or ideas are no longer born on the terrain of contradictions.

This is a fascinating topic, and one not often investigated by critics; however, this is not the place to discuss this theme at length,[41] as the evolution of the structure-superstructure dialectic in the second and third series of the *Notes on Philosophy* needs to be presented.

4 The 'Crisis' of 1931 (Notebook 7)

The *Second Series* of the *Notes on Philosophy* was begun in November 1930, right after the conclusion of the first series, revealing Gramsci's need to move on to questions previously dealt with in order to go deeper into and further develop his analysis. Moreover, § 10 of Notebook 7, *Structure and Superstructure*, opens with an explicit reference to 'the notes in the "First Series"', which justifies the continued validity, absent any explicit denial, of the framing of the problem in terms of the struggle of the 'opposite extremes' as regards the role of the various moments in which the 'relations of force', analysed in detail in Notebook 4, § 38, come into play. Nevertheless, using a 'comparison with the technique of warfare', Gramsci introduced an initial novelty with respect to the preceding text by referring to the need for the political struggle to 'shift from a war of maneuver [he would later say *of movement*] to a war of position', similar to what had occurred regarding military strategy during the First World War. This was the need at least in the

> most advanced states, where 'civil society' has become a very complex structure that is very resistant to the catastrophic 'irruptions' of the immediate economic factor (crises, depressions, etc.): the superstructures of civil society resemble the trench system of modern warfare. Sometimes, it would appear that a ferocious artillery attack against enemy trenches had leveled everything, whereas in fact it had caused only superficial damage to the defenses of the adversary, so that when the assailants advanced they encountered a defensive front that was still effective. The same thing occurs in politics during great economic crises. A crisis does not enable the attacking troops to organize themselves at lightning speed in time and in space; much less does it infuse them with a fighting spirit. On the

41 Gramscian economic concepts will be further discussed below (cf. Chapter 3).

> other side of the coin, the defenders are not demoralized, nor do they lose faith in their own strength or their own future. This is not to say that everything remains intact, but events do not unfold at lightning speed and with the definitive forward march expected by the strategists of political Cadornism. The events of 1917 were the last instance of this kind. They marked a decisive shift in the art and science of politics.

In the span of only a few weeks Gramsci already appeared to have modified his views on the connection between economic crises and 'fundamental historical events': whereas before he had excluded 'any peremptory answer', now he denied any mechanical and immediate relation between the former and the latter; that is, between structure and superstructure. At the same time he intensified his criticism against the large alignment of Marxists who had adopted this thesis, including in this 'Rosa' (Luxemburg), to whom he attributed

> a rigid form of economic determinism, made worse by the notion that effects of the immediate economic factor would unfold at lightning speed in time and space. It was thus historical mysticism through and through, the anticipation of some sort of dazzling miracle.

Still missing, as in (and more so than) Notebook 4, is the criticism of the 'opposite extreme': certainly not because Gramcsi was coming to accept idealistic voluntarism (as some of his interpreters even maintained, for aims that differ from one occasion to the next), but because economism was appearing more and more as the most dangerous misinerpretation (from both the theoretical and practical points of view) of the Marxist-Leninist legacy. It is no coincidence that in Notebook 7, §16 (November–December 1930) Gramsci observed that 'Ilyich [*scil.*: Lenin] understood the need for a shift from the war of maneuver that had been applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position, which was the only viable possibility in the West', even if he 'never had time to develop his formula'. Gramsci intended to take this task upon himself, among other things counterposing the Leninist viewpoint not only against Luxemburg again but also, and especially, against 'Bronstein's [*scil.*: Trotsky's] famous theory of the *permanence* of movement'.

Even clearer is Gramsci's judgement in the second note of Notebook 7 concerning *Structure and Superstructure*, § 24 (February 1931):

> Economy and ideology. The assumption (put forward as an essential postulate of historical materialism) that one can present and explain every political and ideological fluctuation as a direct expression of the

> structure must be combatted in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works,

from *The 18th Brumaire* to the writings on the *Eastern Question*, from *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* to *The Civil War in France*, where one finds 'Marx's less didactic pages', which aim to consider, more than the 'anatomy of society', 'all its full-bodied complexity'.[42] In Gramsci's view

> an analysis of these works allows one to get a better grasp of Marx's historical method, integrating, illuminating, and interpreting the theoretical affirmations scattered throughout his works,

such as in the above-mentioned preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*. Amongst Marx's precautions, the following can be listed as examples:

1. The difficulty of identifying the structure at any moment, statically (like an instantaneous photographic image).

This is contrary to what Gramsci stated in Notebook 4, which appeared in the immediate aftermath of Marx's *Critique* and which represented an interpretation of Marxism that could be defined as 'Engelsian'.

2. … Mechanical historical materialism does not take the possibility of error into account; it assumes that every political act is determined directly by the structure and is therefore the reflection of a real and permanent (in the sense of secured) modification of the structure …
3. Not enough attention is given to the fact that many political acts are due to internal necessities of an organizational character; in other words, they are tied to the need to give coherence to a party, a group, or a society.

In fact, it is not possible 'to find in the structure [of these acts] the primary, immediate explanation'.

During 1931 Gramsci's prison writings slowed considerably and were even interrupted following a health crisis at the beginning of March. When he took up his writing again in November of the same year, working more diligently, many of his positions had changed. It is possible that outside factors again

42 Gruppi 1987, p. 129. For Gramsci's reinterpretation in particular of *The 18th Brumaire*, cf. below, Part 2, Chapter 6, § 1.

intervened to influence this evolution, in particular the missing catastrophic effects on the political stability of Western countries from the dramatic economic crisis in 1929, which many theorists at the Third International had interpreted as the decisive symptom of capitalism's imminent collapse; and the definitive demonstration of Marx's law of the falling rate of profit, which Gramsci instead (already in Notebook 7, § 34, written between February and November 1931)[43] preferred '[to call] (perhaps) a theorem of first approximation', emphasising that 'there is a variable that immediately erases the effect of the law'.

In fact, further on in Notebook 15, § 5 (February 1933; FS, 219–23), and with regard to the 'study of the events which may be subsumed under the name of crisis and which have been prolonged catastrophically from 1929 right down to today', Gramsci writes:

> Whoever wants to give one sole definition of these events or, what is the same thing, find a single cause or origin, must be rebutted. We are dealing with a process that shows itself in many ways, and in which causes and effects become interwined and mutually entangled. To simplify means to mispresent and falsify. Thus, [they represent] a complex process, as in many other phenomena, and not a unique 'fact' repeated in various forms through a cause having one single origin.

At this point, having denied any mechanical aspect regarding the action of the structure on the superstructure, and, in fact, having verified that, if in the '"historical bloc" … the material forces are the content and ideologies are the form', the distinction becomes 'just heuristic because material forces would be historically inconceivable without form and ideologies would be

43 Most of the notes in Notebooks 6 and 7 present particular problems regarding their date, which often does not allow the chronological limits to be more precisely determined. Thus, it is not possible to know if the note in question precedes or follows § 123 of Notebook 6 (March–August 1931), which defined the causes of the post 1929 depression as 'socioeconomic – they are of the same nature as the crisis itself'. However, it is certain that the note precedes § 180 of Notebook 6 (December 1931), in which Gramsci refutes the conformity of scientificity with historical materialism and the model of this presented by the natural sciences; § 128 of Notebook 8 (April 1932, transcribed in Notebook 11 § 52; SPN, 410–14), where he clarifies that the economic political and social 'laws' are in no way deterministic or necessary; and §§ 61–2 from Notebook 9 (July–August 1932, the second transcript of Notebook 13, § 31; SPN, 190–2), in which Gramsci attributes merely a 'metaphoric value' to such laws.

individual fantasies without material forces' (Notebook 7, § 21);[44] therefore the same framing of the problem in the 'architectural' terms of structure and superstructure is necessarily destined to give way.

5 Moving beyond the Architectural Metaphor (Notebook 8: End of 1931–Beginning of 1932)

The first sign of a clear break between the first two *series* of the *Notes on Philosophy*, on the one hand, and the third series in Notebook 8 is that, while the second series contains the aforementioned reference to the first series, Gramsci not only does not do likewise in the third series, but actually intends to have Notebook 8 represent a new beginning, numbering it I on the cover, in the attempt to arrange the notebooks to also include Notebooks 9 (II), 10 (III), 11 (1° bis) and 16 (2 bis).

In effect, the only note in Notebook 8 that carries the rubric heading *Structure and Superstructures*, § 182 (December 1931)[45] appears linked to the formulation of Notebook 7, § 21:

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44 In Notebook 10, II § 1 (FS, 369–70) Gramsci, explicitly referring to Croce, said that such concepts 'may be logically distinct [and] must be conceived historically as an inseparable unit'. Clearly Prestipino 2002, p. 472, had notes of this kind in mind when he stated that structure and superstructure represented more distinct concepts than ones which were 'opposite, not antagonistic', clarifying, however, that 'this last phrase is not part of Gramscian lexis'. On the concepts of *content and form* and *historical bloc*, see instead below, Part 2, Chapter 4, §§ 2 and 4.

45 Keeping in mind the probable interruption that occurred in the writing of the *Notes on Philosophy III* in January of 1932, a sort of reflective pause before moving on to the always more tiring work of writing-rewriting the *Notebooks*, the first block of notes from the third series of *Materialism and idealism* (§§ 166–93, November–December of 1931) can be considered more of an appendix to the second series (completed several weeks earlier) more than as a link to the successive 'philosophical' notes of Notebook 8 (§§ 194–240, February–May 1932, surely not coincidentally simultaneous to an overall turning point regarding his entire prison writings, also related to his worsening relations with the party, as pointed out by Rossi and Vacca 2007, pp. 46 ff.). It must also be noted that the distinction between the three series in *Materialism and idealism*, here expository in nature, is more apparent than real, involving a material separation that owes exclusively to the fact Gramsci (unable to keep all the notebooks he needed in his cell at the same time) was forced to divide into three sections a work that was, moreover, chronologically continuous. In the same way, the separation between 'philosophical' and miscellaneous notes is not as clearcut as these pages seem to show: here, too – though there again appears

> The structure and the superstructures form a 'historical bloc'. In other words, the complex and discordant ensemble of the superstructures reflects the ensemble of the social relations of production.[46] … This reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructures (a reciprocity that is, precisely, the real dialectical process).

In such a dialectical process, as Gramsci writes in § 197 of the Third Series (February 1932), it is not possible to undertake a 'search for laws, for constant, regular and uniform lines', that would presuppose a 'perspective of abstract natural sciences. The only predictable thing is the struggle, but not its concrete moments brought about by continuous movement of the balance of forces that are not reducible to a fixed quantity'. It is for this reason that in the subsequent § 207 (February–March) he finally and definitively moves beyond the previous framework:

> *Questions of terminology*. Is the concept of structure and superstructure – which is the basis for the saying that the 'anatomy' of society is constituted by its 'economy' – linked to the debates stirred up by the classification of animals, a classification that entered its 'scientific' stage precisely when anatomy, rather than secondary and incidental characteristics, came to be regarded as fundamental?[47] The origin of the metaphor that was used to refer to a newly discovered concept helps one to understand better the concept itself by tracing it back to the historically determined cultural world from which it sprang.

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the distinction involving a certain 'arrangement' Gramsci wished to impart to his work – the placing of a note in one as opposed to another section, or notebook, often depends more on practical concerns (the availability at that moment of a certain amount of free space or of a notebook on the prison cell table rather than in the prison warehouse) than on conscious decisions about content. For a complete treatment of this question see Francioni 1992, pp. 713–41, and the personal statements therein contained on the peculiarities of prison activities.

46 On the concept of the 'historical bloc', which was amply developed in various written texts around mid-1932, though not representing the final word by Gramsci on the problem of the nexus between structure and superstructure, since it does not appear in the notes on the topic from 1933–5, see again below, Part 2, Chapter 4, § 4.

47 In § 240 (May 1932), which follows soon after, Gramsci specifies that 'history is not natural science, nor is classification its purpose. So, the reference to the natural sciences and to the need for an "anatomy" of society was no more than a metaphor and a prod to deepen methodological and philosophical research'.

A few lines above in § 206, Gramsci underscores

> how terminology has its importance: errors and deviations ensue when one forgets that terminology is conventional and that one must always go back to cultural sources to identify the precise import of concepts, since different contents may nestle under a single conventional formula. It should be pointed out that Marx always avoided calling his conceptions 'materialist', and whenever he spoke of materialist philosophies he criticised them and asserted that they are criticisable. Marx never used the formula 'materialist dialectic' – he called it 'rational' as opposed to 'mystical', which gives the term 'rational' a very precise meaning.

In this regard, starting with Notebook 4, § 34, entitled *Apropos of the appellation of 'historical materialism'*, Gramsci presents a view attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, according to which

> when something new is discovered in the sciences, one must adopt an entirely new term for it so that the idea remains precise and clear. If you give new meaning to an old term – no matter how strongly you profess that the old idea attached to the term has nothing in common with the idea newly assigned to it – human minds can never be expected to refrain entirely from thinking that there is some resemblance or connection between the old idea and the new one. This confuses science and leads to useless controversies.

Notebook 8, § 207 was redrafted between August and December 1932, becoming Notebook 11, § 50 (FS, 315–18), where the metaphor of the economy as the 'anatomy' of society – which, in § 15 of Notebook 4 (which earlier we had attributed to the 'Bukharin' phase of Gramsci's thought) had been defined as 'apt' – was now classified among those metaphors which are 'crude and violent', to which 'the philosophy of praxis, in setting itself the task of the intellectual and moral reform of culturally backward social strata' has recourse: this 'is useful in defining the limit of the metaphor itself, stopping it in other words from becoming prosaic and mechanical'. This only confirms what has already been observed on 'the role the recognition of metaphors plays in Gramsci's interpretation of Marx. Gramsci's *critical analysis* consists, in fact, in recognising that certain of Marx's expressions are metaphoric and indicate something, a "viewpoint and line of thinking", which, however, should not be taken literally; they cannot be understood as such in their reification' for the purpose of 'reutilizing what in

Marx became reduced to a "metaphor" in a context in which the "metaphoric" takes on conceptual meaning'.[48]

At the same time Gramsci, based on some interpretations 'of recent philosophical debates' in the Soviet Union,[49] concluded, not without reason, that even there 'a mechanistic conception changed into an activist conception – this is, therefore, a polemic against mechanistic thought'. In fact, as he wrote in Notebook 8, § 205 (February–March 1932), the latter

> was a mere ideology, a *superstructure*[50] from the very beginning. What justified it and made it necessary was the 'subaltern' character of certain social groups. For those who do not have the initiative in the struggle and for whom, therefore, the struggle ends up being synonymous with a series of defeats, mechanical determinism becomes a formidable force of moral resistance, of cohesion, of patient perserverance. 'I am defeated, but in the long run history is on my side'. It is an 'act of faith' in the rationality of history transmuted into an impassioned teleology that is a substitute for the 'predestination', 'providence', etc., of religion.

Up to this point Gramsci merely reproposes what had already been affirmed, also in the wake of the debate surrounding the Italian translation of Max Weber's famous essay on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,[51] in Notebook 7, § 44 in regard to the

> transformation of the concept of grace from something that should 'logically' result in the greatest fatalism and passivity into a real practice of enterprise and initiative on a world scale … But now we are seeing the same thing happening with the concept of historical materialism. For many critics, the only 'logical' outcome is fatalism and passivity; in reality, however, it gives rise to a blossoming of initiatives and enterprises that astonish many observers.

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48 Lichtner 1991, pp. 107 ff., which in turn includes considerations expressed by Badaloni 1988. However, on this topic see now Frosini 2010, pp. 112–61 and 162–240.

49 See again on this topic Frosini 2003, pp. 108–22; Rossi and Vacca 2007, in particular Chapter 2.

50 The author's italics aim to underline how, even at this level, one finds the 'weak' use of the term *superstructure*, made possible by the abandonment of its strong acceptance tied to the architectural metaphor.

51 Cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 2825 and 3111, as well as below, Chapter 3, § 4 of the first part of the present work.

Nevertheless, as we saw above regarding § 205 of Notebook 8, it must be considered that

> when the subaltern becomes leader and is in charge, the mechanistic conception will sooner or later represent an imminent danger, and there will be a revision of a whole mode of thinking because the mode of existence will be changed.

It follows that, as stated at the end of the note, 'the ineptitude and futility of mechanical determinism, of passive and smug fatalism, must be exposed at all times, without waiting for the subaltern to become leader and take charge'. In the second draft of the passage in Notebook 11, § 12 (June–July 1932; SPN 323–43) Gramsci pronounced the final death sentence for 'the mechanistic conception', now characterised as 'an ideological "aroma" … like religion or drugs (in their stupefying effect)'.[52] This is why he then affirmed 'the need to bury it', even 'with all due honours' and after the well-deserved 'funeral oration'.[53]

6 The 'Inertia' of the Old Formulations (Notebooks 10, 11 and 13: 1932–3)

Beginning in the spring of 1932 the prison writings continued on a parallel path: taking up part of the previous notes in the 'special' notebooks, with the introduction of more or less significant variations, and the writing (in a single version only) of new notes on various topics, many of which already dealt with by the author.

The first phase, covering more or less the second half of 1932, mainly involved the writing of 'special' notebooks, Notebooks 10 and 11 (without neglecting either the important 'political' notes in Notebook 9, both the miscellaneous sections and those on the Risorgimento, or the writing of Notebook 12, *Scattered*

52 Gramsci expresses a similar view in the almost contemporaneous (June–August 1932) Notebook 10, II, § 36 (FS, 430–3): 'the method might be compared to the use of narcotics, which create an instant of euphoria as regards physical and psychic forces but which weaken the organism permanently'.

53 Once again, in order to get a sense of Gramsci's journey during his prison reflections, it is useful to compare its point of arrival with the starting position, represented here by Notebook 3, § 34 (June–July 1930), where he says that 'the initial poverty of historical materialism – unavoidable in a theory disseminated among the masses – will enable it to expand'.

Notes and Annotations for a Group of Essays on the History of Intellectuals and of Culture in Italy, which, moreover, would shortly be interrupted), two aspects of which should be noted that differentiate them from the subsequent ones:

a) each of the blocks of notes they contain was written by going through and transcribing first the third series of the *Notes on Philosophy* in Notebook 8, followed by the second in Notebook 7, and finally the first series in Notebook 4,[54] which signals a gradual distancing from the old formulations, in particular the lengthy § 38 of the *Notes on Philosophy I*, which, during this phase of the rewriting, was 'skipped over', remaining for the moment as a single draft (we shall see below that it would later be included in Notebook 13);[55]
b) even (if not, above all) with regard to the more recent formulations in Notebook 8, Gramsci introduced significant changes that, concerning the present topic, led him further away from the Marxist *vulgate*.

Some of these second draft notes were examined above in analysing the A texts, to which the reader is thus referred. Here instead, § 15 of Notebook 11 (July–

54 More specifically, §§ 1–10 and 13 of Notebook 10, I and § 31 of Notebook 10, II, and §§ 1–6, 12–19, 36, 40–3, 49–56 of Notebook 11 are second drafts of Notebook 8; from Notebook 7 derive §§ 35, 38–9 and 41.I–IX of Notebook 10, II; §§ 17, 20–5, 45–6 of Notebook 11; § 41.X–XIII of Notebook 10, II. The notes in Notebook 11, §§ 7, 26–35, 37–9, 44, 48, 62–7 come from Notebook 4. In other 'special' notebooks Gramsci instead proceeds in the most obvious manner, taking the notes in the order of the draft: cf., for example, Notebooks 20 (taken from the remains of Notebooks 1 and 5), 22 (from Notebooks 1, 4 and 9), 28 (from Notebooks 1, 4 and 5); it is significant, on the other hand, that Notebook 19 takes first the notes on the Risorgimento from Notebook 9 and then the 'earliest' ones from Notebook 1, in particular the above-mentioned §§ 43–4 (cf. Francioni and Cospito, 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 19', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 17, pp. 1–4).

55 This is even more surprising if one considers that, out of 48 texts that make up the first series of *Materialism and idealism*, only 11 are not transcribed in Notebooks 10 and 11, and of these: six (§§ 1, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 24) merge, due to their heterogeneity, in Notebook 16, *Topics on culture I°*; one (§ 36, *Criteria for literary judgments*) in Notebook 23, *Literary critique*; and only three (§§ 8, 10 and 29), in addition to the one in question here, in Notebook 13. However, the difference is that here this does not represent a problem: this involves two notes on *Marx and Machiavelli* and a bibliographical note on the author of *The Prince*. This omission is even more significant if one considers that all the notes in the *Notes on Philosophy* that come after § 38, and the fourteen that precede it (excluding the above-mentioned note on literary criticism), merge in Notebooks 10 and 11, definitely confirming the complete intentionality of the omission of the long section on the relations of force between structure and superstructure in the 'special' philosophical notes *par excellence*.

August 1932; SPN, 437–40) should be pointed out, taken from the above-cited § 197 of Notebook 8, which already contested 'the way the problem is posed: as a search of law, for constant, regular, and uniform lines', which Gramsci now attributes to the fact that, since

> it 'appears', by a strange inversion of the perspectives, that the natural sciences provide us with the ability to foresee the evolution of natural processes, historical methodology is 'scientifically' conceived only if, and in so far as, it permits one 'abstractly' to foresee the future of society. Hence the search for essential causes, indeed for the 'first cause', for the 'cause of causes'. But the *Theses on Feuerbach* had already criticised in advance this simplistic conception.

In fact,

> one can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result 'foreseen'. Prediction reveals itself thus not as a scientific act of knowledge, but as the abstract expression of the effort made, the practical way of creating a collective will.

Let us return to § 41 of Notebook 10, II (written between August and December 1932): in point X (FS, 399–401), which takes up § 56 of Notebook 4, where he had defined 'the "structure" as a point of reference and as a nonmechanical dialectical "causation" of the superstructures', Gramsci writes simply 'of the structure as point of reference and of dialectical impetus for the superstructures' (eliminating any reference to the concept of *causation*); at point XII (FS, 394–9), in the second draft of § 15 of Notebook 4, where he again accepts the metaphor, decidedly deterministic, of the skeleton and skin, Gramsci now lessens its meaning, lamenting the fact that 'for a long time … it was said' the skin was mere illusion and only the skeleton and anatomy represented true reality, adding, with excessive but characteristic optimism: 'I do not think that many people would argue that, once a structure has been changed, all the elements of the corresponding superstructure must of necessity collapse'.

One of the last examples of an extensive reworking of the A text on this topic is Notebook 10, II, § 61 (from February or, at the latest, February–May 1933; SPN, 114–18), the second draft of Notebook 1, § 150, where Gramsci had written that the state can be conceived 'only as the concrete form of a specific economic world, of a specific system of production', and that thus 'a similar content

calls for a similar political form'. Now he is stating, not without implicit self-criticism, that

> the conception of the State according to the productive function of the social classes cannot be applied mechanically … Although it is certain that for the fundamental productive classes (capitalist bourgeoisie and modern proletariat) the State is only conceivable as the concrete form of a specific economic world, of a specific system of production, this does not mean that the relationship of means to end can be easily determined or takes the form of a simple schema, apparent at first sight.[56]

At a later moment Gramsci probably recovered the key text he had dedicated to the relationship between structure and superstructure in Notebook 4, § 38, transcribing it in Notebook 13, *Notes on the politics of Machiavelli*, §§ 17–18 (SPN 177–85; 158–67).[57] As the ideological and temporal distance gradually increased with respect to his previous formulations, Gramsci found himself caught between the physical impossibility of completely reworking them and his conservative attitude toward his work (to the extent that, throughout the *Notebooks*, the passages he rejected could be counted on the fingers of one hand[58] while those in the A texts are crossed out so as to remain legible). These

56 This was because, as was written just a little earlier in a B text from the same notebook: 'the state is the instrument for bringing civil society into line with the economic structure, but the state has to "want" to do that … To expect civil society, through the work of propaganda and persuasion, to come into line with the new structure … is to fall into a new form of economic rhetoric, a new form of vacuous and inconclusive economic moralism' (Notebook 10, II, § 15, from June 1932; FS, 166–7).

57 Francioni has recently dated the entire notebook to the period from May 1932 to 19 November 1933, the day Gramsci left the prison at Turi (see Francioni and Cospito's 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 13', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 14, pp. 153–4). This allows the following scenario to be put forth: Gramsci went through the *Notes on Philosophy* in Notebook 4 and transcribed most of them (37 notes out of 48) in the 'philosophical' Notebooks 10–11, temporarily 'skipping' the already 'cumbersome' § 38 (using only the last paragraph, where he attributed the concept of hegemony to Marx and Lenin, which merged with Notebook 10, II § 12), only to then insert it, with the necessary caution, in the 'political' Notebook 13. For an accurate analysis of the text from the political viewpoint, and more generally of the topic of the relations of force, cf. Mordenti 1999, in particular pp. 88–95, as well as most recently Frosini 2010, pp. 189 ff.

58 Specifically, Gramsci crosses out the following, either completely or so that the text is partly legible: in Notebook 1, two notes at c. 2*r* and c. 79*r-v*, several words at c. 8*r*, and the first three lines from c. 97*v*; in Notebook 4, four lines at c. 32*r* and the end of the note at cc. 32*v*-33*r*; in Notebook 10 the title of the note at c. 1*r-v*.

factors, along perhaps with reasons of internal symmetry (no note from the first series of *Materialism and Idealism* remained as a single draft,[59] unlike the two subsequent ones, where there was an abundance of passages that remained as a single version, in part due to his worsening health and the emergence of new interests), led him to transcribe these formulations basically unchanged. Therefore all those small indications (for himself and future readers) of a distancing from what he was transcribing should be taken note of: in addition to even minimal, apparently insignificant changes, we find the introduction of adverbs and other dubitative forms, the increased use of inverted commas, parentheses, and so on. To illustrate this, below there is a summary comparison of the two versions [the author's comments are in square brackets]:

A: *Relations between structure and superstructures*. This is the crucial problem of historical materialism, in my view [*theoretical* view]	C: It is the problem of the relations between structure and superstructure which must be accurately posed and resolved if the forces which are active in the history of a particular period are to be correctly analyzed, and the relation between them determined [*practical-operational* view]
A: When studying a structure one must distinguish the permanent from the occasional [*opposition*]	C: In studying a structure, it is necessary to distinguish organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed 'conjunctural' (and which appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental) [*distinction*]
A: One should recall Engels's statement … that the economy is 'in the final analysis' the mainspring of history [i.e., it is the *ultimate cause*]	C: Engels's statement too should be recalled, that the economy is only the mainspring of history 'in the last analysis' [i.e., it represents *only one* of the factors]

59 Representing only a partial exception is § 4, which was eliminated and not later reproduced, though 'rethought and developed in some other notes, even in the same notebook' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2383).

Finally, the reader should note that the conclusion of § 17 contains the insertion of a brief but significant passage from Notebook 8, § 163, where Gramsci had written: 'It is fundamentally important to point out that these analyses are not ends in themselves; rather, they must serve to justify practical work, [and] their purpose is to identify the points at which the force of will can be applied'.

However, the most significant change was the placing of the text not in the 'philosophic' Notebooks 10 and 11 but in the *Notes on the Politics of Machiavelli* in Notebook 13, §§ 17–18, entitled *Analysis of Situations. Relations of Force* and *Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of 'Economics'*, respectively. The presence of titles in these notes in itself is a change from the preceding texts in Notebook (§§ 1–16), which, as normally occurred in the 'special' notebooks, did not contain titles, thereby emphasising their heterogeneous nature. Moreover, it should be noted that Gramsci, in answering the question whether or not 'the fundamental historical crises are directly determined by economic crises', wrote in the A text of Notebook 4, § 38 that 'many observations on this issue are found in the notes already written on the Italian Risorgimento' (that is to say, §§ 43–4 of Notebook 1, where the political analysis was based on class relations and where we find the initial Gramscian implicit formulation of the problem of the relation between structure and superstructure), while in the corresponding C text of Notebook 13, § 17, he wrote that 'the answer is contained implicitly in the foregoing sections, where problems have been considered which are only another way of presenting the one now under consideration'.

These initial sections of Notebook 13 only include – with the exception of a note from Notebook 1 – first draft notes from Notebook 8. Of particular interest here is § 2 (SPN, 175–7; however, the sentence cited below is not included in the English translation), the second draft of § 37, which opens with an explicit reference to 'the notes regarding the study of the situations and what must be understood by "relations of force"': certainly not in § 17 of the *Notes on Machiavelli* (not yet written),[60] but in the corresponding A text and similar texts, since 'relations of force' is the formula Gramsci, at a certain point in time, substitutes for 'relations between structure and superstructures', reiterating that the study is aimed at

> an elementary exposition of the science and art of politics – understood as a body of practical rules for research and of detailed observations useful

60 Vice versa, Gramsci is clearly thinking above all of § 2 when, in § 17, he writes he had already dealt with the question of the 'relations of force'.

> for awakening an interest in effective reality and for stimulating more rigorous and more vigorous political insights … in so far as they are not abstract and illusory.[61]

Similarly, in § 10 of Notebook 13 (SPN, 136–8; second draft of Notebook 8, § 61), Gramsci, contrasting the 'philosophy of praxis' to Croce's philosophy 'of the absolute Spirit', observes that the former distinguishes

> between the levels of the superstructure. The problem will therefore be that of establishing the dialectical position of political activity (and of the corresponding science) as a particular level of the superstructure. One might say, as a first schematic approximation, that political activity is precisely the first moment or first level; the moment in which the superstructure is still in the unmediated phase of mere wishful affirmation, confused and still at an elementary stage.

Furthermore, in the subsequent § 11 (SPN 246–7; second draft of Notebook 8, § 62), Gramsci writes:

> Because one is acting essentially on economic forces, reorganising and developing the apparatus of economic production, creating a new struc-

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61 The A text dates to February 1932, where the decision to shift the analysis of the relations of force from the 'philosophical' level to the 'political' one can be placed; in fact, Notebook 8 § 208 dates to February–March and states that 'philosophy must become "politics" or "practice" in order for it to continue to be philosophy', supporting in its own way both the well-known *Thesis XI on Feuerbach*, 'the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (in Marx 1976, p. 5; see also the Gramsci 2007, p. 745) and the equally well-known expression of the *German Ideology*, of which Gramsci perhaps read an extract in a Russian anthology of the writings of Marx and Engels (cf. Izzo 2008, note 65 on p. 47), according to which 'every profound philosophical problem is resolved … quite simply into an empirical fact' (Marx 1976b, p. 39). In Notebook 9, § 63 (SPN, 200–1) Gramsci defines '"Byzantinism" or "scholasticism" as the regressive tendency to treat so-called theoretical questions as if they had a value in themselves, independently of any specific practice. Typical examples of Byzantinism were the so-called Rome Theses, in which a kind of mathematical method was applied to each issue, as in pure economics'. On the other hand, in actual political history 'the determining force can be so not only because of its quantitative prevalence (that which is not always possible is feasible) but its qualitative prevalence; and this can occur if one has the spirit of initiative, seizes the "right moment", maintains a continuous state of tension of will' (Notebook 9, § 65, written, as was the previous one, in July–August 1932).

> ture, the conclusion must not be drawn that superstructural factors should be left to themselves, to develop spontaneously, from a haphazard and sporadic germination.

This is because, as he clarifies shortly thereafter in § 16 (SPN, 171–3; second draft of Notebook 8, § 84):

> If one applies one's will to the creation of a new equilibrium among the forces which really exist and are operative – basing oneself on the particular force which one believes to be progressive and strengthening it to help it to victory – one still moves on the terrain of effective reality, but does so in order to dominate and transcend it (or to contribute to this).

Of interest again is § 23 of Notebook 13 (partial translation in SPN, 167–8 and 210–18), i.e., the second draft of notes from Notebooks 4, 7 and 9, which Gramsci himself said 'should be linked to the notes on the situations and the relations of force'; in particular, the penultimate paragraph, which represents 'an element to be added to the section on economism' (i.e., to the rewriting of the preceding § 18 from the second part of Notebook 4, § 38), of which he criticised, with significant innovation compared to the first draft, 'the strong conviction that, for the purpose of historical development, objective laws similar in character to the natural laws exist, along with the conviction of a religious-like fatalistic finality', from which 'results not only the uselessness of but the damage to any voluntary initiative seeking to arrange these situations according to some plan'.

Other notes similar in tone from Notebook 13 will be ignored here, recalling instead § 24 (SPN, 233–6), the second draft of Notebook 7, § 10, one of two texts from *Notes on Philosophy* with the title (obviously no longer present) of *Structure and Superstructure*; this text was substantially unaltered except for the recognition, highly significant from the political point of view (to the extent the editors of the topical edition of the *Notebooks* eliminated it), that Trotsky had 'attempt[ed] to begin a revision of the current tactical methods' of struggle based on an awareness of the differences between East and West, even if 'the question was outlined only in a brilliant, literary form, without directives of a practical character'. Gramsci evidently wished to undertake that task himself, providing above all the theoretical apparatus by shifting the age-old question of the causal link between economic structure and political-ideological structure to the level of the analysis of the myriad and ever-changing forms of national and international relations of forces, which a large number of notes from the last phase of his prison reflections deal with.

7 'Unended Quest'[62] (Notebooks 10, 11, 14, 15 and 17: 1932–5)

In February 1933 Gramsci added this significant premise to Notebook 15, the 'Notebook generalizing the concept of "passive revolution"',[63] surely one of the most innovative and fruitful of his entire prison reflections: 'Notebook begun in 1933 and written without dividing up the material and grouping the notes into special notebooks'. This reveals a certain dissatisfaction with how the 'special' notebooks were to be arranged, or, in any event, the awareness many of his new formulations could not properly be rewritten from his old notes.[64] This shows that the C texts, while containing significant changes with respect to the A texts from which they derive (for example, the introduction, in early 1935, of references to nascent Hitlerism in Notebook 20, *Catholic Action – Catholic Integralists – Jesuits – Modernists*, § 4, and in Notebook 28, *Lorianism*, § 1), were not keeping pace with the contemporaneous B texts, where Gramsci's thought was not conditioned by the first drafts, which led him – the more so given that, as the months went by (especially starting with a new dramatic health crisis in the summer of 1933), the energy he had for his writings had begun to wane – to recopy, often mechanically and 'conservatively', his old material.[65] Moreover, it should be remembered that Notebooks 14 and 15 in particular – unlike many contemporaneous 'specials', often interrupted after only a few pages – were used fully by Gramsci, even at times going into both margins of every page,[66]

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62 It goes without saying that the title of a famous work by Popper (1976) has been used here for purely suggestive reasons, without any intention of claiming a parallel between one of the twentieth century's staunchest adversaries of Marxism and one of its main exponents (though a discriminating one).

63 Rossi and Vacca 2007, p. 125.

64 One should interpret similarly the *Note* introducing Notebook 11 and dating back to only two months earlier (December 1932); after having recopied the conclusion to Notebook 4, § 16 on the temporary nature of his annotations and the need to check the texts of reference, Gramsci added the important affirmation (already expressed in the plan of Notebook 8) that 'it might even be the case that the opposite of what they assert will be shown to be true'; a similar warning is contained in an aside to the lengthy § 1 of Notebook 12, dedicated to the problem of the intellectuals.

65 A somewhat 'extreme' example of this is the repetition from the A texts of Notebooks 1 and 9 of the misspelling of '*l'Acerba*' for the journal '*Lacerba*' in the second drafts of §§ 8 and 14, respectively, of Notebook 23, unlike what occurred in the subsequent § 29, which produces the correct spelling from the A text. On the possible reason for this lapsus see Gramsci 2009b, note 1 on p. 132.

66 Cf. Francioni, 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 14', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 16, p. 2; 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 15', ibid., p. 98.

as if he realised that the space (and time) available was by now insufficient for putting down all he still had to say.

Therefore, from this point on it is more useful to search for instances of his creative work in the B texts from Notebook 10 and from the last few miscellaneous Notebooks, 14, 15 and 17. Presented in chronological order below are the most significant parts on 'the crucial problem of historical materialism'. In Notebook 14, § 11 (December 1932–January 1933), Gramsci observed that the study of constitutions 'undertaken from a historical perspective and using critical methods, can be one of the most effective means for combatting mechanistic abstractionism and deterministic fatalism', which instead leads to an analysis of ideological-political superstructure only in terms of its correspondence with economic-social structure.

Notebook 10, II § 54 (February 1933; SPN, 351–4), entitled *What is Man?*, begins with the significant statement that 'this is the primary and principal question that philosophy asks', and no longer that of the relation between the economic foundation and the politico-ideological construction in determining the historical movement. It is true, Gramsci states, that

> one must conceive of man as a series of active relationships (a process) in which individuality, though perhaps the most important, is not, however, the only element to be taken into account. The humanity which is reflected in each individuality is composed of various elements: 1. the individual; 2. other men; 3. the natural world. But the latter two elements are not as simple as they might appear. The individual does not enter into relations with other men by juxtaposition, but organically, in as much, that is, as he belongs to organic entities which range from the simplest to the most complex … Further: these relations are not mechanical. They are active and conscious. They correspond to the greater or lesser degree of understanding that each man has of them … It will be said that what each individual can change is very little, considering his strength. This is true up to a point. But when the individual can associate himself with all the other individuals who want the same changes, and if the changes desired are rational, the individual can be multiplied an impressive number of times and can obtain a change which is far more radical than at first sight ever seemed possible.

Here Gramsci evidently reproduces the intuition from Notebook 8, § 21 (developed in the correspondng C text of Notebook 13, § 1; SPN, 125–33) regarding the 'will as operative awareness of historical necessity', in contrast to *voluntarism* which 'wants to perpetuate oneself as an organic form of historical-practical

activity and not as the initial moment of an organic period' (Notebook 8, § 244). The same concept is widely reaffirmed in the C text of Notebook 14, § 18 (January 1933; SPN, 284–5):

> A distinction must be made between two kinds of voluntarism or Garibaldism. On the one hand, there is that which theorises itself as an organic form of historico-political activity, and celebrates itself in terms which are purely and simply a transposition of the language of the individual superman to an ensemble of 'supermen' (celebration of active minorities as such, etc.). On the other hand, there is voluntarism or Garibaldism conceived as the initial moment of an organic period which must be prepared and developed; a period in which the organic collectivity, as a social bloc, will participate fully. 'Vanguards' without armies to back them up, 'commandos' without infantry or artillery, these too are transpositions from the language of rhetorical heroism – though vanguard and commandos as specialised functions within complex and regular organisms are quite another thing. The same distinction can be made between the notion of intellectual *élites* separated from the masses, and that of intellectuals who are conscious of being linked organically to a national-popular mass. In reality, one has to struggle against the above-mentioned degenerations, the false heroisms and pseudo-aristocracies, and stimulate the formation of homogeneous, compact social blocs, which will give birth to their own intellectuals, their own commandos, their own vanguard – who in turn will react upon those blocs in order to develop them, and not merely so as to perpetuate their gypsy domination.[67]

In Notebook 15, § 5 (February 1933; FS, 219–23) Gramsci returns to the causes of the historical movement, this time examining a concrete historiographic prob-

67 Notebook 9, §§ 60 and 104 (written between May and August 1932) also deals with this. In the former he criticises the tendency to '*daydream and* [*to*] *fantasize*, proof of a lack of character and of passivity. You imagine something has occurred in that the mechanism of neccesity has been overturned. You are now free to take the initiative. Everything is easy. You can do what you want, and you want a series of things you are presently deprived of. It is basically the present overturned and projected into the future. All that is repressed is unleashed'. He observes 'that instead one must violently attract attention to the present exactly as it is if one wants to transform it. The pessimism of intelligence, the optimism of the will'. In the latter passage, on the other hand, he compares the *voluntarism* of the intellectuals from the national-popular alignments to the mercenary nature of the Renaissance captains of fortune in opposition to the national militias invoked by Machiavelli.

lem: the reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire; concerning the Barbarian invasions, he writes they were the '"mechanical" [consequences] (i.e., ones that are not well-known) of another, entirely unknown movement', almost as if to echo Democritus's definition of chance as the simplistic explanation of that which one cannot understand, which in some way is already implicit in the contrast made in Notebook 8, § 128 (April 1932) between historical and 'philosophical' materialism (in the corresponding C text of Notebook 11, § 52 Gramsci would write 'metaphysical'), '[which] "ascribes the world to chance"' (as Dante erroneously criticised Democritus for having done).

In Notebook 15, § 10 (March 1933; SPN, 243–5), again with regard to the *Popular Manual* and his desire to reduce political science to sociology, he writes:

> Lo and behold, society can now be studied with the methods of the natural sciences! [What] impoverishment of the concept of the State which ensued from such views … If it is true that man cannot be conceived of except as historically determined man – i.e. man who has developed, and who lives, in certain conditions, in a particular social complex or totality of social relations – is it then possible to take sociology as meaning simply the study of these conditions and the laws which regulate their development? Since the will and initiative of men themselves[68] cannot be left out of account, this notion must be false.

In the subsequent § 13 (April 1933) he observes that Bukharinian sociologism has, as a practical result, a fatalistic attitude he defines, with significant innovation with respect to what he had previously stated, as drawing upon the concept of *fetishism*, to which he gives a unique meaning:

> How can we describe fetishism. A collective body is composed of single individuals … If each of these individual components considers the organism as extraneous to itself, then clearly this organism no longer exists *de facto* but becomes a phantom of the intellect, a fetish … The individual expects the organism to operate, even if he does not and does not consider that, in fact, since his attitude is very common, the organism is necessarily inoperative. Moreover, we must recognize that, since a deterministic and mechanical conception of history is widespread … every individual, see-

68 The more so in the present era, which, as Gramsci wrote in the preceding § 9, 'is made up largely of these moods or "beliefs", which are as strong as the material facts'.

> ing that, despite his non-intervention, something nevertheless occurs, is led to think that above every individual there is, in fact, a phantasmogorical entity, the abstraction of the collective organism, a sort of autonomous divinity, that does not reason with any concrete mind, but reasons nonetheless, that does not move with the resolute legs of men, but moves nevertheless, etc.

In § 25 (May 1933; SPN, 113–14), Gramsci insists again on the need

> to pose with great precision the problem which in certain historiographical tendencies is called that of the relations between the objective conditions and the subjective conditions of a historical event. It seems obvious that the so-called subjective conditions can never be missing when the objective conditions exist, in as much as the distinction involved is simply one of a didactic character. Consequently it is on the size and concentration of subjective forces that discussion can bear, and hence on the dialectical relation between conflicting subjective forces. It is necessary to avoid posing the problem in 'intellectualistic' rather than historico-political terms.

In other words: there is no sense in abstractly speaking about relations between structure and superstructure[69] (clearly showing self-criticism regarding the leitmotif of the first two Series of the *Notes on Philosophy*); however, one must from time to time, in concrete historico-political analysis, determine the relations among the various forces (economic, political, intellectual, etc.) which are in play, as evidenced also by the title of the note: *Machiavelli*.

The subsequent § 50 (May–June 1933; SPN, 170–1) returns to the concept of prediction:

> It is certain that prediction only means seeing the present and the past clearly as movement. Seeing them clearly: in other words, accurately identifying the fundamental and permanent elements of the process. But it is absurd to think of a purely 'objective' prediction. Anybody who makes a prediction has in fact a 'programme' for whose victory he is working, and his prediction is precisely an element contributing to that victory. This does not mean that prediction need always be arbitrary and gratuitous,

69 On the interchangeability of the *objective-subjective* nexus and the *structure-superstructure* one, cf. below, Part 2, Chapter 4, § 3.

> or simply tendentious. Indeed one might say that only to the extent to which the objective aspect of prediction is linked to a programme does it acquire its objectivity: 1. because strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help make intuition more penetrating; 2. because reality is a product of the application of human will to the society of things (the machine operator's to his machine); therefore if one excludes all voluntarist elements, or if it is only other people's wills whose intervention one reckons as an objective element in the general interplay of forces, one mutilates reality itself. Only the man who wills something strongly can identify the elements which are necessary to the realisation of his will … For it is generally thought that every act of prediction presupposes the determination of laws of regularity similar to those of the natural sciences. But since these laws do not exist in the absolute or mechanical sense that is imagined, no account is taken of the will of others, nor is its application 'predicted'. Consequently everything is built on an arbitrary hypothesis and not on reality.

§ 62 (June–July 1933; SPN, 114) is significantly entitled *First Epilogue*, which speaks among other things of the

> thesis of the 'passive revolution' as an interpretation of the Risorgimento period, and of every epoch characterised by complex historical upheavals; [the] utility and dangers of this thesis; [the] danger of historical defeatism, i.e., of indifferentism, since the whole way of posing the question may induce a belief in some kind of fatalism, etc. Yet the conception remains a dialectical one – in other words, presupposes, indeed postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis which can present intransigently all its potentialities for development. Hence theory of the 'passive revolution' not as a programme, as it was for the Italian liberals of the Risorgimento, but as a criterion of interpretation, in the absence of other active elements to a dominant extent.[70]

70 'It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this note from 1933, whose title itself, *First Epilogue*, quite clearly confers the meaning of an initial provisional arrival point of Gramsci's prison reflections. One should carefully take note of its composition. One might say all the most important topics of the *Prison Notebooks* are therein found again' (Ragionieri 1969, p. 146). On the possibility of using the concept of passive revolution also to criticise the regression under way in Stalin's Soviet Union, see Pons 2008, pp. 426 ff.

In Notebook 17, § 12 (September–November 1933; FS, 423–4) Gramsci is again concerned with distinguishing between the 'philosophy of praxis and "historical economism"', using the following example:

> It is beyond doubt that a group of financiers, who have interests in a given country, may steer the politics of that country, push it into war or keep it out of one. But the ascertainment of this fact is not 'philosophy of praxis', it is 'historical economism', namely, the affirmation that 'immediately', as a 'chance' occurrence, factors have been influented by specific interest groups. That the 'smell of petrol' might heap serious problems down on a country is also beyond doubt etc., etc. … One may say that the economic factor (understood in the immediate and Jewish sense of historical economism) is only one of the many ways in which the more far-reaching historical process is presented (factors of race, religion etc.), but it is this farther reaching process that the philosophy of praxis wishes to explain, and exactly on this score is philosophy an 'anthropology', and not a simple canon of historical research.

In 1934, work on Notebook 17, the last miscellaneous one, slowed down considerably: no more than ten short annotations covering no more than six notebook pages, none of which linked to our problem. Therefore, violating for expository aims alone the purpose mentioned in the quote above, the evidence of Gramsci's reflections in those years will be sought in certain changes in the rewriting of the A texts.[71] During this interim he had begun (in some cases even completed) the 'special' Notebooks 16 and 18–25, consisting almost exclusively of second draft texts. Of particular interest here is a note from Notebook 16, *Topics of culture 1°* (containing among other things, in § 2, the resumption of the *Questions of Method* from Notebook 4, § 1), § 12: this text brings together in its second draft several notes from Notebook 8 (§§ 151, 153, 156 and 159, all from April 1932), in which Gramsci again tries to define the concept of 'human nature'. Consistent with his moving on, in the previous phase, from the deterministic view of the world implicit in the structure-superstructure dichotomoy, up until the A

71 It is not inappropriate here to emphasise that the distinction among the A, B and C texts, just as that between the miscellaneous and 'special' notebooks, should be understood not in an *organic* sense but a *methodic* one. Taking only the last phase of the prison reflections, note, for example, that Notebook 14 is composed of A, B and C texts, just as §§ 68 of Notebook 15 (July 1933) and 38 of Notebook 17 (July–August 1934) are made up of A texts, and that the last 'special' notebook, Notebook 29 (April 1935), is entirely a new draft and not taken from previous notes.

text the author had stated that one could not 'speak of "nature" as if it were something fixed and objective', but rather of the 'ensemble of social relations that determines a historically-defined consciouness'. Nevertheless, while the text from 1932 again underscored the need to 'look at the technical relations of production', in 1934 he would stress that the historical necessity 'moreover, is not obvious, but is in need of being critically recognized and fully supported in almost "sweeping" fashion'. Evidently intervening between the two versions of the text are his reflections in 1933, whose salient aspects have been discussed above.

Similar considerations are possible for § 3 of the 'special' Notebook 19 (on the Risorgimento), the second draft of § 108 del Quaderno 9, where what in text A had been 'the objective, international and national conditions that make national unification a concretely historic task', become in text C the 'subjective and objective' conditions. Or for § 13 of Notebook 22 (dedicated to *Americanism and Fordism*), in which regard it has been observed above that, with respect to the first draft of the texts of Notebooks 4 and 9 from which it derives, Gramsci realised in 1934 that 'production relations have a certain capacity to adapt internally to developments in the productive forces',[72] for which it is extremely difficult to identify a determining element, even in the last instance.

We shall ignore further examples in this regard in order to examine several notes from one of the last 'blocks' of the *Notebooks*, written between September 1934 and June 1935, which present extreme evidence of Gramsci's reflections on the 'crucial problem of historical materialism'. In Notebook 17, § 48, four years after its first formulation, Gramsci returns for the umpteenth time to the 'study of the various "degrees" or "moments" of political or military situations', critically pointing out that:

> It is not usual to make the proper distinctions between: the 'efficient cause', which prepares the historical or political event of different degree of significance (or extension) and the 'determining cause', which immediately produces the event and is the general and concrete result of the efficient cause, the concrete 'precipitation' of the truly active and necessary elements of the efficient cause required to produce the determination. Efficient cause and sufficient cause; that is, 'totally' sufficient, or at least sufficient to the extent necessary to produce the event. Naturally these distinctions can have different moments or degrees: that is, we must examine whether any moment is efficient (sufficient) and

72 Buci-Glucksmann 1976, p. 101.

> determining for the movement from one development to another, or if it can be destroyed by the antagonist even before its 'productivity' has emerged.

Gramsci had neither the time nor energy to further develop the numerous and far from errant[73] insights found in this and other contemporaneous notes; however, they show that toward the middle of 1935 the prison reflections had not ended but were merely suddenly interrupted due to outside events. For example, referring again to § 52 of Notebook 17, where he again takes up his opposition to applying the methods of the 'so-called exact or mathematical sciences' to historico-political analysis, countering these with 'those "humanistic" or "historical" ones; that is, those that refer to man's historical activity, to his active intervention in the vital process of the universe': if the aim of his barbs is evidently still and always directed at the positivist mechanistic determinism, the model of 'humanistic' science is this time indicated in a 'judgment of Hegel's' found in the *Philosophy of Law*. Although not actually recopied in the note, it is useful to quote Hegel: 'Political economy is the science which starts from this view of needs and labour but then has the task of explaining mass-relationships and mass-movements in their complexity and their qualitative and quantitative character'.[74]

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73 On the possibility of there being different forms of causation in the play of economic-social forces, see for example Nicola Abbagnano, 'Determinismo e indeterminismo sociale', now in Abbagnano 2001, pp. 279–354.

74 Quoted in FS, 559–60. What has just been quoted is not, however, the final evidence of Gramscian reflection; this instead belongs to several letters to family members which show, even through short, incidental sentences, the echo of a still dynamic thinking, even if, in all probability, he no longer expressed himself in note form due to waning physical energy. We refer in particular to a letter from the summer of 1936 in which he reprimands his wife Giulia for a 'vulgar evolutionism and, beneath its appearance of rational optimism … a form of quietist fatalism', to which he opposes not an 'historical' pessimism but this statement, not to be taken as strictly autobiographcal: 'I've always thought that my individual fate was a subordinate matter; this does not mean that my individual fate, just like that of any other individual, does not preoccupy me or even "should" not preoccupy me' (LP II, 362–3). Subsequently, perhaps even in 1937, he states 'Quantity becomes quality for man and not for other living beings, or so it would seem' (LP II, 378), appearing to want to give an extreme response to that which, during his prison activity, had shown itself to be 'the primary and principal question that philosophy asks': *What is man?*

8 Provisional Conclusions

In May 1918 Gramsci had written an article entitled *Our Marx*, which, among other things, stated:

> Are we Marxists? Is there such a thing as a Marxist? Stupidity, thou alone art immortal … Marx did not write some neat little doctrine; he is not some Messiah who left us a string of parables laden with categorical imperatives and absolute, unchallengeable norms, lying outside the categories of time and space. His only categorical imperative, his only norm: 'Workers of the world, unite!' With Marx, history remains the domination of ideas, of the spirit, of the conscious activity of individuals, whether single or in cooperation. But the ideas, the spirit, take on substance, lose their arbitrary character; they are no longer fictitious religious or sociological abstractions. Their substance lies in economics, in practical activity, in the systems and relations of production and exchange … Voluntarism? The word means nothing, or it is used in the meaning of arbitrary will. Will, in a Marxist sense, means consciousness of ends, which in turn implies having an exact notion of one's own power, and the means to express it in action.[75]

Several months later he would theorise a solution to the 'crucial problem of historical materialism' that shows interesting parallels with what he proposed some fifteen years later, during the 'mature' phase of the *Notebooks*:

> Between the premise (economic structure) and the consequence (political constitution) the relations are anything but simple and direct … The unravelling of the causation is a complex and involved process. To disentangle it requires nothing short of a profound and wide-ranging study of every intellectual and practical activity. This sort of study is possible only after the events have settled … The unknowns are more numerous than the facts which can be ascertained and verified, and every single one of these unknowns could upset the eventual conclusion. History is not a mathematical calculation; it does not possess a decimal system, a progressive enumeration of equal quantities amenable to the four basic operations … Quantity (economic structure) turns into quality because … it is not the economic structure which directly

75 The quoted passage can be found now in PPW, 54–8.

> determines political activity, but rather the way in which that structure and the so-called laws which govern its development are interpreted.[76]

Subsequently, in particular during the most intense phase of political struggle – first against the old ISP and then against the Bordigian leadership of the Italian CP, and, finally, against the growing tide of fascism – this 'solution' to the problem appears to have been forgotten in many of Gramsci's writings, or at least put aside in favour of the simpler (in that it was simplistic) solution from the vulgate then dominant among international Marxism.[77] One possible explanation of this occurrence could be the fact that in those years Gramsci did 'not [have] the initiative in the struggle and … therefore, [for him] the struggle end[ed] up being synonymous with a series of defeats; mechanical determinism bec[ame for him too] a formidable force of moral resistance, of cohesion, of patient perseverance. "I am defeated, but in the long run history is on my side"' (as he himself wrote, seemingly partly autocritically, in the aforementioned Notebook 8, §205). This phase would extend until the first phase of his prison activity, whose continuity with respect to past aspects has already been emphasised; only during a second phase, while reflecting on the reasons for a defeat, personal as well as political, would he understand that 'the ineptitude and futility of mechanical determinism, of passive and smug fatalism must be exposed at all times, without waiting for the subaltern to become leader and take charge'. It is within this context, which assumes a close interplay between intellectual biography and political theory, that we place the 'return to Marx' spoken of often above,[78] and which was made possible also by

76 *The Russian Utopia* (25 July 1918), now in SPW I, 48–55.

77 Here the present author summarises the results achieved in the last part of his university thesis entitled *Struttura-sovrastruttura nel pensiero di Gramsci. Variazioni sul 'problema cruciale' della filosofia della prassi*: see Cospito 1990, pp. 201–64. Similar considerations are found, moreover, in Gualtieri 2007, in particular p. 1010; also, Izzo 2008, p. 42, notes that in Gramsci 'between 1919 and 1921 the presence of Marx and the associated theoretical discussion is more subtle, with the latter acquiring the tone of the doctrine formulated by the International', while subsequently he 'moves between the didactic rigidities of the orders from the International on Bolshevization and the wealth of new theoretical and cultural acquisitions' following his stays in Moscow and Vienna (ibid., p. 45). For a(n) (even exccessively) severe assessment of the theoretical limits of Gramsci's leadership in the face of the pressure of events that would lead to the ascent of Mussolini's regime, cf., for example, Bedeschi 1999, pp. 31–46.

78 Cf. in this regard in particular the above-cited essay by Francesca Izzo (Izzo 2008).

his deeper theoretical (as well as practical) thinking on Marxism, in particular during his decisive stay in Moscow and then Vienna, before his definitive return to Italy.[79]

That it is the concrete political analysis that 'reacts' to the theoretical formulation, and not vice versa (it could not be otherwise, given that, from a purely 'philosophical' viewpoint, the solution to the problem Gramsci continued to pose to himself cannot but appear obvious: a thinker who considers himself *Marxist*, has to maintain the *primacy* of economic factors, even 'in the final analysis') is demonstrated by two other factors as well:

a) Many of the 'miscellaneous' notes from Notebook 3, written between May and October 1930, on the immediate eve of the 'arrangement' of Notebook 4, appear not only to anticipate it but even, though implicitly, to have gone beyond it. Thus, beginning with § 42 (June–July 1930) Gramsci underscored the '*apparent contradictions*' between the 'fatalistic and mechanistic conception of history' and the 'formalistic voluntarist positions' (those that would represent the 'opposite extremes' in Notebook 4, § 38). In § 119 (August–September 1930) he observed, analysing 'the weakness of Italian political parties over their entire period of activity, from the Risorgimento on':

> the main reason for this mode of existence of the parties is to be found in the deliquescence of the economic classes, in the gelatinous economic and social structure of the country, but this explanation is somewhat fatalistic. In fact, if it is true that the parties are nothing other than the nomenclature of the classes, it is also true that the parties are not merely mechanical and passive expressions of the classes themselves but also react energetically with the classes to develop them, solidify them, and universalize them.

Similarly, in Notebook 5, § 55, written between October and November 1930, and thus at the same time or shortly after Notebook 4, § 38, where Gramsci again saw the relation between structure and superstructure in terms of 'causation', even 'nonmechanical dialectical', he maintained instead that 'if it is difficult to discover and agree on the causes of particular events, it is even more difficult, and almost absurd, to try to discover the reasons why history unfolded in a certain way rather than in another'.

79 On this last aspect, which cannot be dealt with here even cursorily, see Lussana 2008, pp. 881–98.

Many other examples could be given, in particular for many notes in Notebook 6 (written between the end of 1930 and the beginning of 1932), which has been defined as 'the notebook of the State',[80] which fully develops Gramsci's theory on 'civil society' (to which we shall return below) with respect to the contemporaneous *Notes on Philosophy* in Notebooks 7 and 8; or for several sections of Notebook 9, where the materialism-idealism dichotomy is clearly and definitively abandoned, being considered now as two sides of the same coin, starting with Bernstein's 'idealistic revisionism' which:

> under an 'orthodox' interpretation of the dialectic hides a purely mechanistic conception of the movement, according to which the human forces are considered as passive and unaware, as not dissimilar elements of material things.[81]

A dichotomy which, as we have seen, Notebooks 10, 11 and 13 (made up largely of A texts from Notebooks 4, 7 and 8) seem to repropose, though with all the nuances and distinction analysed above.

b) There are direct statements by Gramsci in the above-mentioned conversations with his prison companions in the autumn of 1930 (and thus contemporaneous to the 'arrangement' of Notebook 4, § 38) where he suggested that, 'in order to break with those who accuse Marxism of mechanism, fatalism, economic determinism and economism, he suggested not speaking any more of "structure" and "superstructure", etc., but only of historical process, where all the factors play a role; only the prevalence of that process was economic'.[82] Gramsci thus anticipated by more than a year his conclusions in the theoretical reflections in the Third Series of the *Notes on Philosophy*.

All that remains now is to conclude this discussion of the development of Gramsci's ideas on the 'crucial problem of historical materialism' in the *Notebooks* by going back to where we started, quoting a passage from Gramsci referring to one of his 'authors' (at that time, Marx, at this stage most likely Lenin) in order to represent an interpretative key of Gramsci's work itself:

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80 Buci-Glucksmann 1976, p. 308.

81 Notebook 9, § 6; similar considerations are found in §§ 26 and 130–1.

82 Garuglieri 1946, p. 697; at that time the *Notebooks* had not yet been published, so this is not an 'invented recollection'. On this question see, lastly, the above-cited Rossi and Vacca 2007, in particular Chapter 3, 'Il cazzotto nell'occhio'.

> It can be that a great personality expresses the more fecund aspects of his thought not in the section which, or so it would appear from the point of view of external classification, ought to be the most logical, but elsewhere, in a part which apparently could be judged extraneous. A man of politics writes about philosophy: it could be that his 'true' philosophy should be looked for rather in his writings on politics. In every personality there is one dominant and predominant activity: it is here that his thought must be looked for, in a form that is more often than not implicit and at times even in contradiction with what is professedly expressed. Admittedly such a criterion of historical judgment contains many dangers of dilettantism and it is necessary to be very cautious in applying it, but that does not deprive it of its capacity to generate truth.[83]

The adoption of this *criterion* obliges us to move on to an analysis of the key concept of Gramsci's entire political theory: *hegemony*.

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83 Notebook 11, § 65 (SPN, 403–4).

CHAPTER 2

Hegemony

1 Introduction

There is a vast literature on Gramsci and the concept of *hegemony*: we need only consider that with regard to this item the *On-Line Gramsci Bibliography* contains a thousand or so texts. Moreover, beyond the writings explicitly dealing with this topic,[1] there is no Gramsci scholar or interpreter of his thought who, beginning with the first, partial editions of his writings, has not dealt with this topic, which is 'the leitmotif of the *Notebooks*', whereas 'the theory of civil society' and the 'theory of the State represent only one chapter'.[2]

Given this tradition, which in particular has delved deeply into the definition of the concept of hegemony regarding its various meanings in the *Notebooks*, as well as the relation between the latter and Gramsci's political writings, on the one hand, and Marxist, Leninist and Third Internationalist tradition[3] on the other, what follows will not seek to propose a new interpretation of the crucial category nor, through it, of Gramsci's entire work. On the contrary, benefitting from over a half century of Gramscian critical analysis and philology, the present work will trace the various stages in the taking up and treatment of this concept in the *Prison Notebooks*, with the aim of arriving at a 'summary' definition of it, limiting itself to directing the reader to what are the more important studies on the association of this concept with the pre-imprisonment writings,[4] the *Letters from Prison*, and the possible sources of Gramsci's thinking on this question.

To this end we shall examine and comment on, following the chronological order of the draft, a number of particularly significant notes. However, before undertaking this analysis it is useful to recall what has been said about the unique nature of the lexis of the *Notebooks*, in particular regarding its key con-

1 The first monograph on this topic to our knowledge was Gruppi 1972. For a reasoned and exhaustive bibliography see Liguori 2008, pp. 45–64; Chiarotto 2008, pp. 65–76.

2 Vacca 2008, p. 92.

3 On this topic see especially Di Biagio 2008, pp. 379–402, as well as his unpublished work *L'egemonia leninista*, which was widely utilised in Vacca's essay cited in the preceding note; this essay emphasised the complex evolution of the concept in both Lenin's writings and those of his closest collaborators and immediate successors.

4 For a thorough and balanced treatment of the question see Giasi 2008b, pp. 147–86.

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cepts:[5] in fact, for the term *hegemony* Gramsci also adopts a linguistic expression common to his time, attributing to the term, even at times throughout the same note, not only quite different meanings but often meanings quite far from common usage, as well as some which had crystallised in the various traditions of philosophical and political thought, from his own tradition (Marxism and its various versions) as well as others (in particular, though not only, Crocean neoidealism). During the course of his prison reflections, Gramsci would further develop and examine these meanings.

2 'Posing the Issue'

As is the case with (almost) all of Gramsci's fundamental categories, the topic of hegemony also appears right from the *First Notebook*; more precisely, during the above-mentioned 'explosion' of theoretical reflection on the Risorgimento in §§ 43–4, in which various elements emerge, some for a so-called 'lengthy duration' and destined to remain unchanged in subsequent prison reflection, while others were barely outlined and would undergo considerable transition over time; and still others from which Gramsci would later continue to distance himself. The first evidence of the term *hegemony* is in § 44, entitled *Political class leadership before and after assuming government power*: the lengthy note contains the peculiar expression *political hegemony*, which, significantly, was in inverted commas, indicating the special semantic weight he intended even then to attribute to it with respect to both its common meaning, which can be defined as 'weak', of preeminence, supremacy,[6] and a set of uses he himself adopts,[7] beginning with the rest of the same note (which speaks of French

5 In this regard we can only restate what Sanguineti 1987, p. XXI, affirmed as the 'interpretative rule that characterizes Gramsci's conceptual style … which, though employing a lexis that is circumscribed in a calculated and carefully controlled manner, and deliberately heterogeneous in its sources and roots, as a whole doesn't tend to crystallize into categorically rigid formulae the reflective experience, but, almost to the contrary, probes the resistance of a notion, of a significance, through the network of relations of meaning which is woven together, heaping on it the movement dialectic of the true history, bringing to light the concrete connections which, from time to time, are transparently revealed … Gramsci is not, in fact, organizing a classificatory system of ideas … but a sort of second conceptual dynamic, a historical metaphilosophy tied mainly to practical reason … historical and social'.

6 In these same years the *Vocabolario della lingua italiana* by Nicola Zingarelli (Zingarelli 1935, p. 436) speaks, for example, of 'Supreme leadership. The preeminence of one state over others'.

7 Dario Ragazzini has pointed out that in this note 'even "leading" and "dominant" are in

hegemony over Europe, or of Paris over the rest of France during the revolution, of 'Piedmontese hegemony' over the other ancient Italian states, 'of the North over the South in a city-country territorial relation', and so on). Many other meanings would be added to these in the subsequent notes, ending up with a vast spectrum of highly nuanced connotations covering equally vast amounts of contexts, from the economy to literature, religion to anthropology, psychology to linguistics. In this regard, the distinction between fields, as well as their meanings, can only involve expository aims, or to use Gramscian terminology, *methodical* and *non-organic* ones, if we consider what probably was the last use of the term in question in § 3 of Notebook 29, *Notes for an introduction to the study of grammar*, written in April 1935 (CW, 183–4). Returning to his linguistic studies as a youth, to which some attribute the remote origins of the concept of hegemony,[8] Gramsci wrote:

> Every time the question of the language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony.

Cultural hegemony, in turn, is not compared with *political* hegemony, as evidenced, on the one hand, by Gramsci's use of expressions such as *politico-*

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inverted commas, signifying the specific semantic-conceptual value to be attribued to them, which was not exactly the current one and which not even Gramsci considered as completely understood and unequivocal' (Ragazzini 2002, p. 15). However, it is not always possible or useful to distinguish, in this and the notes that follow, between the 'strong' and 'weak' uses of the concept of hegemony, due to the presence of an undefined number of intermediate meanings in virtue of the aforementioned polysemicity of this and other Gramscian lexical terms. In any case, in the following pages we shall concentrate exclusively on (several) notes in which this concept is used in contexts which are undoubtedly and uniquely strong and full of meaning, omitting all those passages where its use, extremely frequent in fact, particularly during the first part of the prison reflections, presents no difficulties or specific elements of interest, at the cost of excluding entire notebooks from consideration (such as the 'miscellaneous' Notebook 2 (defined as such by Gramsci himself), or several of the final 'special' ones).

8 We are referring above all to the well-known theses of Lo Piparo 1979, re-presented by the author in a subsequent essay, Lo Piparo 1987, for a critical analysis of which see Schirru 2008, pp. 397–444.

cultural, *politico-intellectual*, *intellectual*, *moral and political*, and so on,[9] and on the other by statements such as that in Notebook 10, II§ 6.IV (FS, 306), according to which 'the philosophy of praxis conceives of the reality of human relationships of knowledge as an element of political hegemony'.

Returning now to § 44 of Notebook 1, which already explicitly or in essence presents all the problems tied to the concept of hegemony that subsequently would be gradually detailed and developed, even if not in a linear and univocal way, and whose principal stages will be presented here while trying to answer several questions: what particular meaning does Gramsci wish to give to *political hegemony*?; on what battle grounds do the hegemonic conflicts occur?; who are the main players?; what is the theoretical paradigm of reference for this entire set of topics?

As far as the meaning to attribute to *hegemony* is concerned, from the start Gramsci appears to oscillate between a narrower meaning of *leadership*, which some have wanted to compare to Weber's *legitimate power*,[10] contrasted with (even before it becomes) *domination*, and a wider inclusion of both (*leadership* + *domination*). Moreover, as Vacca has emphasised, 'unlike 1924–6, the concept of hegemony is no longer tied to the problem of the proletariat's conquest of power, but refers to the conquest and exercise of power by any social class of group whatsoever'.[11] In fact, it is with reference to events in the Risorgimento that Gramsci writes:

> The politico-historical criterion on which our own inquiries must be grounded is this: that a class is dominant in two ways: namely, it is 'leading' and 'dominant'. It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) 'lead' even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but it also continues to 'lead' … There can and there must be a 'political Hegemony' even before assuming government power, and in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government.

Unlike what occurred for other Gramscian categories, this oscillation continued in subsequent notes as well and was never completely resolved, creating

9 For a complete review of the various meanings and declensions of hegemony, see Francioni 1984, p. 203.

10 Cf., for example, Paci 1992, p. 17 (but see *passim*, the entire volume).

11 Vacca 2008, p. 100.

more than a few interpretative difficulties (some have spoken of *antinomies*),[12] which can perhaps at least in part be overcome by referring to the continually changing context. For example, in § 48 of Notebook 1 the distinction is made between a

> 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classic terrain of the parliamentary regime [that] is characterized by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion

(hegemony as *leadership* + *domination*), and situations in which

> the hegemonic apparatus creaks and the exercise of hegemony becomes ever more difficult.[13] The phenomenon is presented and discussed in various terms and from different points of view. The most common are: 'crisis of the principle of authority', 'dissolutions of the parliamentary regime',

and the struggle to conquer or reconquer hegemony is subordinated, or in any event contrasted to, the exercise of domination-power. Gramsci dedicates several notes to these situations, subsequently defined as the *crisis of hegemony* or the *organic crisis*, several of which, originally contained in Notebooks 4, 7 and 9, were reworked in the second draft of the lengthy § 23 of Notebook 13 (most likely dating to November 1933; partial translation in SPN 166–7, 210–18)[14] and titled *Observations on Certain Aspects of the Structure of Political Parties in Periods of Organic Crisis*:

> In every country the process is different, although the content is the same. And the content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent

12 The reference is to Anderson 1978; the first to emphasise the need to follow in chronological order the development of the concept of hegemony and the other Gramscian political categories, in order to avoid similar significant misunderstandings, was Francioni 1984, pp. 147 ff.

13 The phrase that appears in the C text in Notebook 13, § 27 (SPN, 219–22) is 'permanently difficult and aleatory', as emphasised by Rossi and Vacca 2007, p. 135.

14 Cf. above, note 57 to Chapter 1.

> of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A 'crisis of authority' is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State.

Such situations can be compared in some way to those in which a mature bourgeoise State has not yet emerged or has not fully developed. Continuing to follow the draft order of Gramsci's notes, we encounter in particular the case of *Americanism* in § 61 of Notebook 1 (the first that bears this rubric heading); in fact, in the United States 'hegemony is born in the factory and does not need so many political and ideological intermediaries'. In 'this new type of society … the "structure" dominates the superstructures more directly and the superstructures are rationalized (simplified and reduced in number)'. In fact, in this type of society 'there has not yet been (except sporadically, perhaps) any "superstructural" blossoming; therefore, the fundamental question of hegemony has not yet been posed'.

This question will be developed and more deeply examined by Gramsci in various passages, among which Notebook 6, § 10 (November–December 1930):

> America has yet to surpass the economic-corporative phase, which the Europeans traversed during the Middle Ages; in other words, it has not yet produced a conception of the world and a group of great intellectuals to lead the people within the ambit of civil society. In this sense, it is true that America is under the influence of Europe, of European history. (This question of the form-[phase] of the state in the United States is very complex, but the kernel of the question seemes to me precisely this).

In Notebook 8, § 185 (December 1931), this view is extended to every form of new state, past, present and future:

> *The economic-corporative phase of the state*. If it is true that no type of state can avoid passing through a phase of economic-corporative primitivism, one can deduce that the content of the political hegemony of the new social group that has founded the new type of state must be predominantly of an economic order. This would entail the reorganization of the structure and of the real relations between people and the sphere of the

> economy or of production. The superstructural elements will inevitably be few in number; they will typify struggle and farsightedeness, though the component parts of 'plans' will still be meager. The cultural plan will be mostly negative: a critique of the past aimed at destructions and erasure of memory. Constructive policy will be still at the level of 'broad outlines', sketches that could (and should) be changed at all times in order to be consistent with the structure as it takes shape.

Notebook 5 § 105 (November–December 1930) appears to contradict the notes just cited. In the Notebook Gramsci observes, with regard to the novel *Babbit*, that in America 'the intellectuals are detaching themselves from the dominant classes in order to unite themselves to it more closely, to be a real superstructure and not just an inorganic and indistinct element of the structure-corporation', while 'European intellectuals have already partially lost this function'.[15]

In any event, Gramsci holds that the division between dominance and leadership, power and consensus, is destined to occur even during the initial phases of the struggle for the construction of the new socialist society, before the levels of hegemony and dictatorship once again balance themselves out and become blurred.

3 Hegemony and Civil Society

However, on what battleground will the struggle to gain and/or preserve hegemony take place? As with many other questions, this topic is not explicitly dealt with in Notebook 1, though in § 130 (part of the block of notes written between February and March 1930, whose importance has been dealt with above) Gramsci introduces a concept that would be amply developed and was widely connected to the topic of hegemony: *civil society*. After a couple of references to the concept in the notes in Notebook 3 (August–September),[16] the relation

15 Gramsci's interest in the relation between intellectuals, power and society in the U.S. was fostered by translations of the monographic issue of the journal 'Die Literarische Welt', which he undertook in Notebook A during early 1929; this has been discussed in the introduction and in the notes regarding the *Quaderni di traduzioni* (Gramsci 2007, in particular pp. 15–17 and 121 ff.).

16 Reference here is especially to § 90 (August) entitled *History of the subaltern classes*, where, moreover, Gramsci appears already aware of the impossibility of reducing the question of hegemony to the mere relations of class on the level of production, maintaining that 'one must study: (1) the objective formation of the subaltern classes through the developments

between hegemony and civil society is dealt with in the *Notes on Philosophy* in Notebook 4, in particular in § 38 (October), which takes up the *Relations between structure and superstructures*, a topic whose treatment had 'still [been] postponed'.[17] Gramsci first distinguished between three moments in which the relations of force play out; an initial moment entails

> a relation of social forces that is closely linked to the structures; … a subsequent moment is the political 'relation of forces': that is, the assessment of the degree of homogeneity and self-consciousness attained by the various social groups …; the third moment is that of the 'relation of military forces', which from time to time is immediately decisive.

He then explains that the second moment, in which the mediation occurs between the first and third in the determination of the historical movement, can be divided in turn into various phases,

> corresponding to the different levels of political consciousness as they have manifested themselves in history up to now. The first and the most rudimentary is the primitive economic moment: a merchant feels himself in solidarity with another merchant, a manufaturer with another manufacturer, etc., but the merchant does not yet feel solidarity with the manufacturer; in other words, there is an awareness of the homogeneous unity of the professional group, but there is no such awareness yet of the social group. A second moment is the one in which there is an attainment of consciousness of the solidarity of interests among all the members of the social group – but still in the purely economic sphere.

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and changes that took place in the economic sphere; the extent of their diffusion; and their descent from other classes that preceded them; (2) their passive or active adherence to the dominant political formations; that is, their efforts to influence the programs of these formations with demands of their own; (3) the birth of new parties of the ruling class to maintain control of the subaltern classes; (4) the formations of the sublatern classes themselves, formations of a limited and partial character; (5) the political formations that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes, but within the old framework; (6) the political formations that assert complete autonomy, etc. These phases can be listed in even greater detail, with intermediate phases or combinations of several phases … Therefore the history of a political party of these classes is also very complex'. Recently Guido Liguori has drawn attention to this passage in Liguri 2004, p. 217, noting that the C text in Notebook 25, § 5 (SPN, 52–4) is 'even more explicit' in this regard.

17 Buci-Glucksmann 1976, p. 64.

> During this politico-economic phase, the question of the state is posed, but only in terms of rudimentary political equality: there is a claim of the right to participate in, modify, and reform administration and legislation within the existing general framework. A third moment is that in which one becomes conscious of the fact that one's own 'corporate' interests, in their present and future development, go beyond the 'corporate' confines – that is, they go beyond the confines of the economic group – and they can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups. This is the most patently 'political' phase, which marks the clear-cut transition from the structure to complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies come into contact and confrontation with one another, until only one of them – or, at least, a single combination of them – tends to prevail, to dominate, to spread across the entire field, bringing about, in addition to economic and political unity, intellectual and moral unity, not on a corporate but on a universal level: the hegemony of a fundamental social group over the subordinate groups.

At this point the subaltern group can emerge 'behind the economic-corporate phase in order to advance to the phase of politico-intellectual hegemony in civil society'.[18] Thus, as affirmed shortly thereafter in § 46, the civil society is the terrain for the exercise of or the 'struggle for hegemony'. This topic is further

18 Gramsci would criticise theoretical syndicalism for the lack of understanding of this connection, citing its incapacity to permit the emergence of the subaltern group, which is the expression of the economic-corporative phase, since it continues to be subjected to 'the intellectual hegemony of the dominant group, since theoretical syndicalism is an aspect of laissez-faire liberalism justified with some statements derived from historical materialism', and thus in the final analysis one of the forms of the economistic 'deviation' of its doctrines, which must in fact be opposed through reference to the concept of hegemony. Moreover, already in § 14 of Notebook 4 (May–August 1930, recopied essentially as is, two years later, in Notebook 11, § 27), Gramsci observed that 'to maintain that historical materialism is not a completely autonomous structure of thought really means that the ties to the old world have not been completely severed. As a matter of fact, historical materialism has no need for extraneous support: it is itself so robust that the old world turns to it to supply its own arsenal with some more effective weapons. This has itself started to exercise a hegemony over the old intellectual world. This happens in reciprocal ways, naturally, but that is precisely what needs to be thwarted. The old world, while rendering homage to historical materialism, seeks to reduce it to a body of subordinate, secondary criteria that can be incorporated into its idealist or materialist general theory. Whoever reduces historical materialism to a similar role within this theoretical terrain is implicity capitulating before the enemy'.

developed in particular in Notebook 6 (whose political significance has been emphasised heretofore on several occasions), and also in the miscellaneous Notebooks 5, 7 and 8 and the notes on the Risorgimento in Notebook 9. It is highly useful to focus on several of these crucial passages, as it is possible to apply to the development of Gramsci's thinking the statements in § 46 of Notebook 4, where, on the one hand, he noted (as mentioned above) that

> it is really very difficult for the occasional 'philosopher' to know how to make abstractions from the prevailing currents of his time or from interpretations of a certain conception of the world that have become dogmatic, etc. On the other hand, however, as a political scientist, he feels himself free from the *idols* of the age; he deals with the same conception of the world more directly; he penetrates it to the core and develops it in an original way;

and on the other, drawing on a consideration of Rosa Luxemburg's 'about the impossibility of dealing with certain questions of historical materialism insofar as they have not yet become *actual* for the course of history in general or for the history of a particular social group', he commented that 'the science of politics is developed in the phase of struggle for hegemony':[19] examining these questions can throw light on 'philosophic' themes otherwise destined to remain abstract and unresolvable.

Above all, in § 24 of Notebook 6 from December 1930 Gramsci is concerned with

> Distinguish[ing] civil society as Hegel understands it and in the sense it is *often* [italics added] used in these notes (that is, in the sense of the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the whole of society; as the ethical content of the state) from the sense given to it by Catholics, for whom civil society is, instead, political society or the state, as opposed to the society of the family and of the church.

In § 81, written between March and August 1931, the coincidence between the hegemonic and civil society levels is stated beginning with the title, the first that contains the term *hegemony* in the rubric:

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19 Significantly, the passage is transcribed unchanged in Notebook 11, § 65 (between August and December 1932; SPN, 403–4); moreover, Gramsci had expressed a similar concept in Notebook 3, § 31 (June–July 1930), which would be reaffirmed in the C text in Notebook 11, § 70 (partial translation in SPN, 386–8).

> *Hegemony* (*civil society*) *and separation of powers*. The separation of powers, all the discussion that its implementations stirred up, and the legal theorising it generated were the outcome of a struggle between [the] civil society and the political society … Essential importance of the separation of powers for political and economic liberalism: the entire liberal ideology, with all its strengths and weaknesses, can be epitomized by the principle of the separation of powers. Therein one can see the source of liberalism's weaknesses: it is the bureaucracy that is the crystallization of the management personnel that exercises coercive power and at a certain point becomes a caste. Hence the people's demand to make all public offices elective; a demand that is extreme liberalism and, at the same time, its dissolution (principle of the permanent Constituent Assembly, etc.; in republics, the regular elections of the head of state create the illusion that these elementary popular demands are met). The unity of the state in the separation of powers: parliament has closer ties to civil society; judiciary power, positioned between government and parliament, represents the continuity of the written law (even against the government). Naturally, all three powers are also organs of political hegemony, but with a difference of degree: (1) parliament; (2) judiciary; (3) government. It is noteworthy that breaches in the administration of justice make an especially disastrous impression on the public: the hegemonic apparatus is more sensitive in this sector (and arbitrary actions by the police or the political administration may redound upon it as well).

In Notebook 7, § 83 (December 1931), speaking of 'what is called "public opinion"', Gramsci stated that this 'is tightly connected to political hegemony; in other words, it is the point of contact between "civil society" and "political society", between consent and force'. This is a concept which arose

> on the eve of the collapse of the absolutist state, that is, during the period when the new bourgeois class was engaged in the struggle for political hegemony and the conquest of power. Public opinion is the political content of the public's political will that can be dissentient; therefore, there is a struggle for the monopoly of the organs of public opinion – newspapers, political parties, parliament – so that only one force will mold public opinion and hence the political will of the nation, while reducing the dissenters to individual and disconnected specks of dust.

The apparent contradiction with the preceding identification of hegemony to civil society is resolved by taking into account the polysemousness of the latter

concept and that of State, with which it is associated; this sheds further light on the relation between hegemony, direction and domination. In fact, in some notes Gramsci intends 'state = political society + civil society, that is, hegemony protected by the armor of coercion', as in §§ 87–8 of Notebook 6 (in § 155 he would say 'dictactorship + hegemony', while in § 137 he speaks of 'apparatus of government' and of '"private" apparatus of hegemony or civil society').[20]

Beginning in November–December 1930, in another group of sections from Notebook 6 and 7 dedicated especially to a criticism of Crocean ethico-political history (interpreted as an attempt (even though partial and unilateral) at a 'translation' of the concept of hegemony, which would be taken up again and developed in a subsequent block of notes between the spring and summer of 1932),[21] Gramsci opposes the excessive counterposing of 'the aspect of history that is related to "civil society", to hegemony' to 'the aspect of history related to state-governmental activity' (Notebook 7, § 9), asking himself: 'Has there ever been a state without "hegemony"?' (Notebook 8, § 227). The answer is obviously 'No', which leads to further examination of the concept of hegemony as a unifying element between civil society and political society within the State, and thus between the moment of consensus and that of force, between the aspect of leadership and that of domination, attributing to Machiavelli the merit of having been the first to understand (even without expressing it explicitly) this connection (Notebook 8, §§ 48 and 86, February–March 1932),[22] within what Gramsci often defined in this period as 'the concrete historical bloc'.

This rejection of the Crocean opposition between the two moments certainly does not imply an acceptance of their rough identification, as proposed, for example, by Gentile, who, in § 10 of Notebook 6,

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20 For a diachronic analysis of the Gramscian concept of *civil society*, cf. below, Part 2, Chapter 5, § 4.

21 See Notebook 8, § 112 (developed in Notebook 10, I, § 10; FS, 351–4), § 227 (transcribed in Notebook 10, I, § 7; FS, 343–6), §§ 70 and 73 (taken up again in Notebook 11, §§ 51–2; SPN, 371; 310–14); Notebook 10, I, §§ 12–13 (FS, 357–8; 358–61) etc. These notes were written between March and August–December 1932 and often serve as a *traît d'union* between the A and C text the letters sent by Gramsci to Tania in response to the latter's urgings, in turn suggested by Sraffa, to 'review' the recent historical publications by Croce. For the latest on this topic see Rossi and Vacca 2007, pp. 46–55, according to which the letter exchange was part of a more complicated system of communication, addressed to Togliatti above all, between Gramsci and the clandestine party regarding urgent current questions regarding political, national and international events.

22 For further analysis of the link between Gramsci and Machiavelli as a historical figure in relation to the concept of *hegemony*, cf. Fontana 1993.

> posits the (economic-)corporative phase as an ethical phase within the historical act: hegemony and dictatorship are indistinguishable, force is no different from consent; it is impossible to distinguish political society from civil society; only the state exists and, of course, the state as government, etc.

In the subsequent § 136 (August 1931), Gramsci develops the concept of 'hegemonic apparatus' already outlined in Notebook 1, § 48, according to which

> in any given society nobody is unorganized and without a party, provided that organization and party are understood broadly, in a nonformal sense. The numerous private associations are of two kinds: natural and contractual or voluntary. In this multiplicity of private associations, one or more prevails, relatively or absolutely, constituting the hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (civil society), which is the basis for the state in the narrow sense of governmental-coercive apparatus,

and goes on to criticise Gentile's position as a mere hypostatisation of the fascist regime, observing that, as with any totalitarian regime, this one tends to:

> (1) ensure that the members of a particular party find in that one party all the satisfactions that they had previously found in a multiplicity of organizations, that is, to sever ties these members have with extraneous cultural organisms; (2) destroy all other organizations or to incorporate them into a system regulated solely by the party.

Moreover, he distinguishes between situations in which 'the party in question is the bearer of a new culture – that is a progressive phase', from others where

> the party in question wants to prevent another force, bearer of a new culture, from becoming itself 'totalitarian' – this is a regressive and objectively reactionary phase, even if the reaction (always) does not admit it and tries to create the impression that it is itself the bearer of a new culture.[23]

23 Liguori 2004, p. 221, emphasises that 'hegemonic apparatus' is an 'expression … of fundamental importance as it is associated with the materiality of the hegemonic processes: it is not only a matter of a "battle of ideas" but of true *apparatuses* intended to create consensus'. Similar statements are found in the subsequent § 162 (October–November 1931). In Notebook 7, § 80 (December 1931), Gramsci instead faces the problem of how different

The difference between fascist and communist totalitarianism, highlighted by Gramsci also through the use of inverted commas for the positive meaning of the adjectival use of the term – which is also found in Notebook 7, § 93, and in Notebook 25, *At the margins of history* (*the history of subaltern social groups*), § 4 – is thus that, while the former tends to reabsorb civil society into the state, thereby reducing hegemony to force, in the latter

> the state-coercion element withering away gradually, as the increasingly conspicous elements of regulated society (or ethical state of civil society) assert themselves … In the theory of state→regulated society (from a phase in which state equals government to a phase in which state is identified with civil society), there must be a transition phase of state as night watchman, that is, of a coercive organization that will protect the development of those elements of regulated society that are continually on the rise and, precisely because they are on the rise, will gradually reduce the state's authoritarian and coercive interventions. This is not to say that one should think of a new 'liberalism', even if the beginning of a new era of organic freedom were at hand.[24]

As Gramsci describes, beginning in § 127 of Notebook 5 (November–December 1930):

> It is not possibile to create a constitutional law of the traditional type based on this reality, which is in continuous movement; it is only possible

countries have tried 'to reconstruct the hegemonic apparatus', which was damaged, when not destroyed, by the consequences of the First World War: 'this could not be done without the use of force – but such force could not have been "legal" force, etc. Since the ensemble of social relations was different in each state, the political methods of using force and the combining of legal and illegal forces had to be different as well. The greater the mass of apolitical individuals, the greater the role of the illegal forces has to be. The greater the politically organized and educated forces, the more one must "cover" the legal state, etc.' For an overall reappraisal of the Gramscian interpretation of fascism see Colarizi 2008, pp. 339–59. Dating § 136 to August 1931 is based on the link (pointed out by Liguori 2004, p. 214) between the note in question and the letter to Tatiana of 7 September 1931 (LP II, 65–8), which, in fact, allows us to further 'pinpoint' the chronology of the note (which belongs to a group placed by Francioni during the period between March and August). Moreover, the manuscript reveals continuity in its graphic treatment with the writing of §§ 135–7; and § 137 is based on a source from August, as are the subsequent §§ 141–2. The entire group of §§ 135–42 could thus be assigned to August 1931 (dates provided by Francioni).

24 Notebook 6, § 88.

> to create a system of principles asserting that the end of the state is its own end, its own disappearence: in other words, the reabsorption of political society into civil society.

The long struggle to establish this new model of social organisation is nevertheless destined to occur on the terrain of civil society, understood in the broadest sense used above, and in any event not in opposition to the state, in recognition of the fact that 'among the beleaguered classes in modern society there is not only antagonism but also *interdepedence*'. Gramsci borrows from Marx in stating '… the need to avoid the class struggle ending up leading to the "common ruin" of the classes in struggle'.[25] Beginning with § 138 of Notebook 6 (August 1931), Gramsci describes this struggle using an image from military language, the war of position, which

> calls on enormous masses of people to make huge sacrifices, that is why an unprecedented concentration of hegemony is required, and hence a more interventionist kind of government that will engage openly in the offensive against the opponents, to ensure, once and for all, the 'impossibility' of internal disintegration by putting in place controls of all kinds – political, administrative, etc., reinforcement of the hegemonic positions of the dominant group, etc. All of this indicates that the culminating phase of the politico-historical situation has begun, for, in politics, once the 'war of position' is won, it is definitively decisive. In politics, in other words, the war of maneuver drags on as long as the positions being won are not decisive and the resources of hegemony and the state are not fully mobilized. But when, for some reason or another, these positions have lost their value and only the decisive positions matter, then one shifts to siege warfare – compact, difficult, requiring exceptional abilities of patience and inventiveness. In politics, the siege is reciprocal, whatever the appearances; the mere fact that the ruling power has to parade all its resources reveals its estimate of the adversary.

In § 52 of Notebook 8 (February 1932) this strategy is opposed to that of the permanent revolution, or better yet, to the Trotskyian interpretation of Marx's original concept,[26]

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25 Vacca 2008, p. 105.

26 As Francioni 1984 notes (p. 212), 'it is clear that Gramsci speaks in the *Notebooks* of a *permanent revolution* involving two different (though never confusable) meanings: one to designate Marx and Lenin's theory of revolution, whose final formulation is found in

> [which] emerged around 1848 as a scientific expression of Jacobinism, at a time when the great political parties and economic trade unions had not yet come into existence – a concept that would subsequently be absorbed and superseded by the concept of 'civil hegemony' … the 1848 concept of war of movement is precisely the concept of permanent revolution; in politics, the war of position is the concept of hegemony that can only come into existence after certain things are already in place, namely, the large popular organizations of the modern type that represent, as it were, the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the war of position.

These concepts would be reaffirmed and developed in the corresponding C text in Notebook 13, § 7 (SPN, 242–3).

It remained to define who the protagonists were of such a war; here, too, the answer can only come from a diachronic reinterpretation of the prison notes, which reveals a gradual stratification of subjects and a subsequent shift in emphasis from one to the other, without, however, totally abandoning the previous solutions. During the first phase attention is clearly focused on class: in fact, starting with the initial treatment in § 44 in Notebook 1 we read that

> the whole problem of the various political currents of the Risorgimento, of their reciprocal relations, and of their relations with the homogeneous or subordinate forces of the various historical sections (or sectors) of the national territory is reducible to the following basic fact: that the Moderates represented a relatively homogeneous class, and therefore their leadership underwent relatively limited oscillations, whereas the Action Party did not found itself specifically upon any historical class and the oscillations which its leading organs underwent resolved themselves, in the final analysis, according to the interests of the Moderates.

The previous chapter pointed out that Gramsci would soon soften the rigidity of this statement; if this were not so, if for him the problem truly came down simply to this, then it would not be clear why, beginning with the continuation of this section and for all of his further reflections on the Risorgimento, he felt the need to acknowledge that 'the politics of the Moderates' had the merit '[of making] the Risorgimento possible in the forms and within the limits in which

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the concept of hegemony, the other to indicate the economistic position of Trockij'. This is not the only instance of a non-univocal use of concepts in the prison writings, as will be further examined below, Part 2, Chapter 5.

it was accomplished as a revolution without revolution',[27] while at the same time criticising the attitude of the leaders of the Action Party, beginning with Mazzini, for their inability to make different decisions given the circumstances, as another passage from this long note would appear to indicate: 'if a Jacobin party did not arise in Italy, the reasons should be sought in the economic field, that is, in the relative weakness of the Italian bourgeoisie and in the different historical atmosphere of Europe', because of which 'the bourgeoisie could not further extend its hegemony over the vast strata which it had been able to embrace in France'.

Nevertheless, during this phase of his thinking Gramsci, in presupposing – without ever explicitly stating – a somewhat mechanical rather than dialectical link between the relations of class and political struggle, and more generally, between the economic base and ideological constructions, reproposes exactly the famous proposition from *German Ideology* according to which 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas',[28] which would in fact make it impossible for the leaders of the subaltern classes to overcome hegemony before effectively gaining political and economic power. Several authors have noted that the theoretical position of the *First Notebook* appears to go back to the final phase of Gramsci's pre-imprisonment reflections, in particular to the 1926 essay, still unpublished at the time of his arrest (it would only be published by Togliatti in 1930, during the so-called 'leftward shift' of the Italian CP and its struggle against 'social fascism'), entitled *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*.[29] This is undoubtedly the most complete and coherent of Gramsci's political writings, containing many themes that would be taken up again and developed in the prison reflections – from the question of alliances to that of the need for the class that wants to become the leading and dominant force to move beyond the corporative phase, from the topic of the intellectuals to the focus on the cultural phase of hegemony – which reveal a precocious attempt, to be compared on the political level with the contemporaneous letter to the CC of the CP(b), to free himself of the theoretical limitations of Marxism-Leninism and move to a translation-reinterpretation of the classical texts through the decisive mediation in the interaction with the most advanced

27 Gramsci would later add the clarification 'or, in V. Cuoco's words, as a passive revolution', an indication that, at that moment, not even this other fundamental category of political analysis was completely developed. As it is not possible to deal with this question here, see instead the essay by Voza 2004, pp. 189–207.

28 Marx 1976b, p. 59. On the gradual abandonment of this architectural metaphor linked to this view, see the previous chapter.

29 Now in PPW, 313–37.

elements of 'bourgeoise' culture (Croce). Similar to what occurred previously regarding the relations between structure and superstructure, this would lead him to reject any schematicism even as regards the various levels on which hegemony occurs.

However, this occurred at the end of a complex and bumpy journey, of which the 1926 essay and the notes from the *First Notebook* represent only the starting point, appearing at times, more or less consciously, still tied to strictly class analytical schemes (and thus to economicist ones) that prevailed during the period of the Third International.[30] Further proof of this is found in § 48 of Notebook 1, where Gramsci maintains that 'political consent is regained (hegemony is mantained) [by] broadening and strengthening the economic base through industrial and commercial development up to the epoch of imperialism and the world war'. Subsequently he would tone down such statements, writing, for example, as early as § 200 of Notebook 6 (December 1931), that when studying the development of a national class, one must take into account not only the process of its formation within the economic sphere but also its parallel growth in the ideological, juridical, religious, intellectual, philosophical spheres, etc. Indeed, one ought to say that growth in the economic sphere cannot take place without these other parallel developments. Still, every movement that is the bearer of a 'thesis' leads to movements of 'antithesis' and [then] to partial and provisional 'syntheses'.

Much later, in Notebook 14, § 23 (January 1933; SPN, 222–3), Gramsci would return, perhaps with theoretical (regarding his formulations in the first few notebooks) and practical self-criticism (with reference to his experience as a defeated political leader), to the link between relations of force and political struggle:

> It would be an error of method (an aspect of sociological mechanicism) to believe that in Caesarism – whether progressive, reactionary, or of an intermediate and episodic character – the entire new historical phenomenon is due to the equilibrium of the 'fundamental' forces. It is also

30 In this regard, Portelli 1973, p. 93, noted that in Gramsci's last work before his imprisonment the topic of hegemony was subjected to an 'extremely dangerous interpretation, to the extent it risks leading to that theoretical error that the notion of hegemony allows us to combat: economism'. In turn, Bobbio 1990, points out that the term in question here is still 'used in conformity with its significance in Soviet texts' (p. 69), unlike what occurs in the subsequent notebooks. More generally, the link between the 'political' notes in Notebook 1 and the last pre-imprisonment writings has been emphasised by Mangoni 1987, pp. 565–79. For a detailed comparison between the notes on the Risorgimento in Notebook 1 and the essay on the *Southern Question*, see instead the notes by V. Gerratana in *Q*, 2473–86.

> necessary to see the interplay of relations between the principal groups (of various kinds, socio-economic and technical-economic) of the fundamental classes and the auxiliary forces directed by, or subjected to, their hegemonic influence.[31]

Only by looking at the landing point of Gramsci's reflections is it thus possible to share Paolo Spriano's view that hegemony 'is *always* an ethico-political concept, *never* an economic one; it assumes, in fact, the capacity of the "new Prince" to become a leader of the civil society'.[32]

4 Hegemony and the Intellectuals

In the meantime Gramsci introduced, or rather developed, an additional agent of *hegemonic influence*, represented by the intellectuals. Outlined already in the *Southern Question*,[33] this aspect already explicitly appears in the note from Notebook 1, § 44, mentioned above, in which the leaders of Cavour's moderate party were defined as

> the 'intellectuals' in an organic sense … already naturally 'condensed' by the organic character of their relations with those classes of which they were an expression. (For a good number of them, an identity was realized between the represented and the representative, the expressed and the expressor; that is, the Moderate intellectuals were a real, organic vanguard of the upper classes[)].

At the same time Gramsci arrived at a fundamental

> criterion of historico-political research: there does not exist an independent class of intellectuals, but every class has its intellectuals; however, the intellectuals of the historically progressive class exercise such a power of attraction that, in the final analysis, they end up by subordinating the intellectuals of the other classes and creating an environment of solidarity among all the intellectuals, with ties of a psychological (vanity, etc.) and often of a caste (technico-juridical, corporate) character.

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31 On Gramsci's use of the category of the Marxian political analysis of Caesarism or Bonapartism, see below, Part 2, Chapter 6, § 1.

32 Spriano 1958, p. 541; italics added.

33 Cf. Vacca 2008, pp. 81 ff.; Giasi 2007.

Their influence would be considerably increased beginning with § 49 of Notebook 4 (November 1930), which accompanies a broadening of the concept to the point of including not only the intellectuals in a narrow, professional sense, but industralists, scientists, ecclesiastics, clerks, and so on, including (in Notebook 8, § 22 (January–February 1932)) the philosopher-governors of Plato's *Republic*, who are destined to undertake 'in a certain sense a "social" activity for the improvement and education (and intellectual direction, thus having a hegemonic function) of the polis', and also, as we shall see below, the collective intellectual represented by the party understood as a modern Prince. Gramsci would conclude, in the second and longer draft of § 1 of Notebook 12 (May–June 1932; partial translation in SPN, 5–33), that 'all men are intellectuals', even if

> not all men have in society the function of intellectuals … Thus there are historically formed specialised categories for the exercise of the intellectual function. They are formed in connection with all social groups, but especially in connection with the more important, and they undergo more extensive and complex elaboration in connection with the dominant social group.[34]

Moreover, as is already clear in the A text in Notebook 4, § 49,

> the function of organizing social hegemony and state domination has various levels and among these levels some are purely manual and instrumental – carrying out orders rather than having responsibility, being an agent rather than a bureaucrat or an official, etc.; obviously, however, nothing prevents one from making this kind of distinction (nurses and doctors in a hospital, sacristans-caretakers and priests in a church, janitors and teachers in a school, etc., etc.).

34 In this case as well a trace of the evolution in Gramsci's thinking is preserved in his letters, in particular one to Tatiana on 7 September 1931 (LP II, 65–8): 'I greatly amplify the idea of what an intellectual is and do not confine myself to the current notion that refers only to the preeminent intellectuals. My study also leads to certain definitions of the concept of the State that is usually understood as a political Society (or dictatorship, or coercive apparatus meant to mold the popular mass in accordance with the type of production and economy at a given moment) and not as a balance between the political Society and the civil Society (or the hegemony of a social group over the entire national society, exercised through the so-called private organizations, such as the Church, the unions, the schools, etc.); it is within the civil society that the intellectuals operate (Ben. Croce, for example, even if from time to time he comes into conflict with this or that government, etc.)'.

In any event, from that moment on Gramsci attributed to intellectuals

> *a*[35] function in the 'hegemony' that is exercised throughout society by the dominant group and in the 'domination' over society that is embodied by the state, and this function is precisely 'organizational' or connective. The intellectuals have the function of organizing the social hegemony of a group and that group's domination of the state; in other words, they have the function of organizing the consent that comes from the prestige attached to the function in the world of production and the apparatus of coercion for those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively or for those moments of crisis of command and leadership when spontaneous consent undergoes a crisis.

The study of the intellectual's role as 'bureaucrats' or, as Gramsci explicitly states in the C text, 'the dominant group's "deputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government',[36] entails a deeper examination of another theme only touched on in Notebook 1: the instruments needed to achieve and maintain hegemony; that is, the *systems* or *hegemonic apparatus*, above all 'scholastic activity, at all levels' (§ 46), in the widest sense of the term, since, as Gramsci would later state (Notebook 10, II, § 44, written during the second half of 1932; partially transl. in FS, 156–7),

> the educational relationship cannot be limited to strictly 'scholastic' relationships, by means of which the younger generations come into contact with the older ones, absorbing the historically necessary values and experiences of the latter in the process of 'maturing' and developing their own historically and culturally superior personality. This relationship exists throughout all society considered as a whole as well as for each individual relative to other individuals, between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between governors and the governed, between elites and their followers, between leaders and led, between vanguards and the body of the army. Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation,

35 Italics added: evidently not the only one.

36 In this regard note again, with respect to text A, the clarification that 'this research on the history of the intellectuals will not be "sociological" in nature [that is, *à la* Bukharin], but will produce a series of essays on the "history of culture" (Kulturgeschichte) and the history of political science', even if Gramsci is the first to be aware of 'how difficult it will be to avoid some schematic and abstract forms associated with "sociology"'.

> between the various forces that comprise it, but in the entire international and world field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations.

Therefore, the periodicals, in particular the 'encyclopedic and specialized journals' (again from Notebook 1, § 46), the repressive organisations, legal and otherwise, in addition to, as he stated already in § 179 of Notebook 8 (December 1931), 'numerous other so-called private initiatives and activities havi[ing] the same goal, and … constitut[ing] the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes', in which he would also include, in § 53 of Notebook 14 (February 1933), 'religious organizations and charitable bequests' (which perhaps are more common in Italy 'than elsewhere … owing to private initiatives', which, however, are 'badly administered and distributed') among the 'elements to study as national links between governors and governed, as hegemonic factors', opposing charity as a 'paternalistic element' to 'intellectual services [as] hegemonic elements, that is, of democracy in the modern sense'.

The gradual decline in importance of the role of class with respect to that of the intellectuals in the exercise of hegemony, to be linked to its frequent even though non-systematic substitution with expressions such as *social group* or *social grouping* (for example, in the rewriting of § 44 of Notebook 1 in § 24 of Notebook 19, between July–August 1934 and February 1935 – partially translated in SPN, 55–84 – which is all the more significant in that, as Gramsci proceeded in the ever-more difficult – given his increasingly precarious psycho-physical condition – rewritings of the miscellaneous notebooks in the special notebooks, this work tended to gradually become transformed into an increasingly more literal transcription),[37] made possible a less mechanical link between the economic and hegemonic levels. In fact, it is true, as he states in § 49 of Notebook 4, that

> every social group coming into existence on the primal basis of an essential function in the world of economic production creates together with itself, organically, a rank of several ranks of intellectuals who give it homogeneity and a consciousness of its own function in the economic sphere.

37 Equally significant in this sense is 'the movement from "classes" to "social groups"' in the rewriting of § 14 of Notebook 3 'in the second section of special notebook 25 (1934), entitled "At the margins of history (History of subaltern social groups)"', as pointed out by Baratta 2007, p. 42. On the entire question of the changes in terminology between the first and second drafts, it is still useful to refer to the pioneering Romagnuolo 1991, pp. 123–66.

Nevertheless,

> the relationship between the intellectuals and production is not direct, as in the case of fundamental social groups, but mediated … by two types of social organization: (a) by civil society, that is, by the ensemble of private organizations in society; (b) by the state.

Moreover,

> every social group emerging into history out of the economic structure finds or has found – at least in all of past history – preexisting categories of intellectuals that moreover seemed to represent a historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated changes in social and political forms.

More subtle still is the following formulation in Notebook 9, § 124 (September–November 1932): 'A new group entering hegemonic historical life, with a self-confidence it did not possess before, cannot help but produce from within it figures who previously would not have found sufficient force to emerge, etc.' Nearly two years later, in the second draft of the note (Notebook 23, *Literary Critique*, § 6, second half of 1934; CW, 98), Gramsci would define such 'self-confidence' of the new social group as 'hegemonic behaviour', reaffirming that the (collective as well as individual) self-awareness represents the first step along the road toward the consolidation of hegemony.

5 Hegemony and the Party

To be considered in this regard is the gradual emergence, starting with § 127 of Notebook 5 (November–December 1930) and throughout 1931, at least concerning the question of the achievement of hegemony by the proletariat, of the role of the party understood as the 'Modern Prince', the expression (preceded by that of 'new prince' in Notebook 4, § 10) which, beginning with Notebook 8, § 21 (January–February 1932), would become a rubric title that contained 'the collection of ideas on political science that may be assembled into a work that would be conceived and organized along the lines of Machiavelli's *Prince*'. As Gramsci explains in § 37 (February):

> This series of observations might be the right place for the notes on the study of situations and on what is meant by 'relations of force'. The study

> of how 'situations' should be analyzed – that is, how to go about establishing the various levels of relations of force – could serve as a basic exposition of political science, understood as an ensemble of practical rules for research. Alongside this: an explanation of what is meant in politics by strategy and tactics, by 'plan', by propaganda and agitation; organizational principles, etc. Insofar as they are not abstract or imaginary, the practical elements – usually treated in a haphazard fashion in political treatises (Mosca's *Elementi di scienza politica* may serve as an example) – ought to be included in the study of the various levels of the relations of force. One could start with international relations of force (incorporating the notes concerning the definition of a great power) and then move on to objective relations within society – that is, the degree of development of productive forces – to the relations of force in politics [(or hegemony)][38] or between political parties and to military relations or, better, to direct political relations.

In fact, this interest in Machiavelli not only is already present from the start of Notebook 1 (§ 10), it can be found, with respect to the prison period, as early as 1926.[39] Nevertheless, for a long time this interest only concerned the historical figure of the Florentine secretary and his place in the wider contemporary European context. It certainly is no coincidence that Gramsci's greater interest in him occurred at the same time as his deepened theoretical reflections on hegemony. In this regard, one must concur with those who have observed that, in the continuation of the *Notebooks* 'the interest for Machiavelli grows and becomes more focused as Gramsci continues to explore and develop the idea of the complexity of the historical crisis the world is going through, and in particular as the contradictory and non-mechanical nature of the relations

38 The words in parentheses are interlinear additions by Gramsci himself.

39 In a letter dated 27 December 1926, Gramsci asks Tatiana for 'Francesco Ercole's book on Machiavelli, and three issues of F. Coppola's review *Politica* that contain articles also by the same Ercole' (LP I, 54–5); nearly one year later, on 14 November 1927, he would recall that: 'When the Machiavelli centenary occurred [that is, the previous June], I read all the articles published by the five dailies that I used to read at the time; later on I received the special issue of *Marzocco* on Machiavelli' (LP I, 152–3). It has also been observed that, despite the 'rare recurrence of the name "Machiavelli" in the pre-prison writings … we can say that involved here is a latent interest of study whose roots are in his university years but which truly became focused during his political struggles, to then finally become expounded in the "tranquility" of the prison' (Fiorillo 2008, p. 849; see also *passim*, the entire essay). On *Machiavelli filosofo della prassi* see Izzo 2009, pp. 121–45.

among the political processes internal to these crisis emerged … as the dramatic historical experience of the failure of the revolution in the West shows the lack of coincidence between the economico-structural crisis and the politico-revolutionary solution',[40] as is clearly apparent from the rapid stabilisation in European capitalist nations (except for Weimar Germany) after the great crisis of 1929.

In any event, Gramsci's reflections on Soviet revolutionary experience played a fundamental role, starting from the fact that, as he stated in Notebook 5, § 127:

> In reality, in certain states, the 'head of state' – that is, the element that balances the various interests struggling against the predominant but not absolutely exclusivistic interest – is precisely the 'political party'. With the difference, however, that in terms of traditional constitutional law the political party juridically neither rules nor governs. It has 'de facto power', it exercises the *hegemonic function*,[41] and hence the function of balancing various interests, in 'civil society'; however, 'civil society'[42] is in fact so thoroughly intertwined with political society that all the citizens feel instead that the party rules and governs. It is not possible to create a constitutional law of the traditional type based on this reality, which is in continuous movement; it is only possible to create a system of principles asserting that the end of the state is its own end, its own disappearence: in other words, the reabsorption of political society into civil society.

The party is thus depicted as the bearer of a *substantial* model of democracy, different, even if not entirely antithetical, to the *formal* parliamentary one, as revealed by several later notes in which the latter is re-assessed to be in opposition to the *black*, *tacit* or *implicit parliamentarism*, represented by fascist corporatism and also attributed, though in *Aesopic* form, to Stalin's regime

40 Donzelli 1981, p. XVIII. For a recent treatment, bibliographical as well, of the entire question, see Livorsi 2004, pp. 49–61.

41 Italics added, to indicate the emergence of another concept destined to soon be amply developed, starting with Notebook 7, § 90, which will be referred to below.

42 As occurred often in the *Notebooks*, the inverted commas served to indicate the awareness he was using a concept in a different sense to the common one, which he would define a little further on (December 1930), in the above-cited Notebook 6, § 24. That between civil and political society there was a *methodical* and *non-organic* distinction is confirmed by the concluding passage of Notebook 5 § 127, where Gramsci clarifies that the former is 'in fact so thoroughly intertwined' with the latter (cf. also below, Part 2, Chapter 5, § 4).

(*the hypocrisy of self-criticism*, the *liquidation* of Trotsky, and so on). Gramsci stated in § 74 of Notebook 14 (March 1935; SPN, 254–6), in which the condemnation of the contradictions under way in the USSR emerged more clearly than elsewhere:

> *Self-Criticism and the Hypocrisy of Self-Criticism*. It is clear that self-criticism has become a fashionable word. The stated claim is that an equivalent has been found to the criticism represented by the 'free' political struggle of a representative system – an equivalent which, in fact, if it is seriously applied, is more effective and fruitful than the original. But this is the nub of the matter: that the surrogate should be applied seriously, that the self-criticism should be operative and 'pitiless' – since its effectiveness lies precisely in its being pitiless. In reality it has turned out that self-criticism offers an opportunity for fine speeches and pointless declarations, and for nothing else; self-criticism has been 'parliamentarised'. For it has not yet been remarked that it is not so easy to destroy parliamentarism as it seems. 'Implicit' and 'tacit' parliamentarism is far more dangerous than the explicit variety, since it has all its defects without its positive values. There often exists a 'tacit' party system, i.e. a 'tacit' and 'implicit' parliamentarism where one would least think it. It is obvious that it is impossible to abolish a 'pure' form, such as parliamentarism, without radically abolishing its content, individualism, and this in its precise meaning of 'individual appropriation' of profit and of economic initiative for capitalist and individual profit. Hypocritical self-criticism is precisely a feature of such situations. Beside statistics give an index of the real position. Unless it is claimed that criminality has disappeared – which in any case other statistics disprove (and how!). The entire subject needs re-examining, especially with respect to the 'implicit' party system and parliamentarism, i.e., that which functions like 'black markets' and 'illegal lotteries' where and when the official market and the State lottery are for some reason kept closed. Theoretically the important thing is to show that between the old defeated absolutism of the constitutional régimes and the new absolutism there is an essential difference, which means that it is not possible to speak of a regression; not only this, but also to show that such 'black parliamentarism' is a function of present historical necessities, is 'a progress' in its way, that the return to traditional 'parliamentarism' would be an anti-historical regression, since even where this 'functions' publicly, the effective parliamentarism is the 'black' one. Theoretically it seems to me that one can explain the phenomenon with the concept of 'hegemony', with a return to 'corporativism' – not in

> the *ancien régime* sense, but in the modern sense of the word, in which the 'corporation' cannot have closed and exclusivistic limits as was the case in the past. (Today it is corporativism of 'social function', without hereditary or any other restrictions[)].

In going back to this question in the subsequent § 76 (SPN, 256–7), Gramsci confirmed that, even though at the time he wrote the 1926 letter he adhered to the Stalinist line, at the same time, however, contesting its form, his opinion had now changed:

> In discussing this subject, care must be taken to exclude the slightest appearance of support for the 'absolutist' tendency, and that can be achieved by insisting on the 'transitory' character of the phenomenon (in the sense that it does not constitute an epoch, not in the sense of its 'short duration'). (With respect to this, it should be noted that the fact of 'not constituting an epoch' is too often confused with brief 'temporal' duration: it is possible to 'last' a long time, relatively, and yet not 'constitute an epoch': the viscous forces of certain régimes are often unsuspected, especially if they are 'strong' as a result of the weakness of others) … 'Black' parliamentarism appears to be a theme which should be developed quite extensively; it also offers an opportunity to define the political concepts which constitute the 'parliamentary' conception. (Comparisons with other countries, in this respect, are interesting: for example, is not the liquidation of Leone Davidovi [Trotsky] an episode of the liquidation 'also' of the 'black' parliamentarism which existed after the abolition of the 'legal' parliament?). Real fact and legal fact. System of forces in unstable equilibrium which find on the parliamentary terrain the 'legal' terrain of their 'more economic' equilibrium; and abolition of this legal terrain, because it becomes a source of organisation and of reawakening of latent and slumbering social forces. Hence this abolition is a symptom (and prediction) of intensifications of struggles and not vice versa. When a struggle can be resolved legally, it is certainly not dangerous; it becomes so precisely when the legal equilibrium is recognised to be impossible. (Which does not mean that by abolishing the barometer one can abolish bad weather).[43]

43 We shall have occasion in the following chapter to return to the more or less implicit criticism in these and other previous notes of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regression of the Soviet regime between the end of the 1920s and the mid-1930s. In this regard, it

This allows Gramsci to create in § 191 of Notebook 8 (December 1931) an explicit connection between

> *Hegemony and democracy*. Among the many meanings of democracy, the most realistic and concrete one, in my view, is that which can be brought into relief through the connection between democracy and the concept of hegemony. In the *hegemonic system*,[44] there is democracy between the leading group and the groups that are led to the extent that [the development of the economy and thus] the legislation [which is an expression of that development] favors the [molecular] transition from the groups that are led to the leading group.

This is certainly a more acceptable connection if one considers, regarding this as well as other similar expressions, *hegemony* to be synonymous with *leadership* rather than with *leadership+domination*.[45] In any event, in order to fully exercise its hegemonic (and democratic) role on all of society, the party must above all exercise it internally. As Gramsci writes in the contemporaneous § 90 of Notebook 7,

> by looking at the internal development of the parties, one can evaluate their hegemonic role or political leadership. If the state represents the coercive and punitive force of a country's juridical order, the parties – representing the spontaneous adherence of an elite to such regulation, considered as a type of collective society that the entire mass must be

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has been noted that 'this arrangement of ideas reveals the reccurring attention to Soviet experience, to the situation in the U.S., to fascist construction, which is often found within the same note and often even entails an overlapping of the same words, which gives the effect that they have three times the value at the same time' (Ragazzini 2002, pp. 82 ff.).

44 Italics added, to indicate an expression that would reoccur in § 2 of Notebook 13 (SPN, 175–7), second draft of § 37 of Notebook 8, where Gramsci defined the 'relations of political force and those between parties' as 'hegemonic systems within the State'.

45 On the key nexus between hegemony and democracy, and more generally on the possibility of adopting the concept of hegemony as a unitary interpretative key for the entire prison writings, see Vacca 1991, pp. 1–114; Rossi and Vacca 2007, in particular Chapter 3, which states 'both the theory of hegemony developed in the *Notebooks* as well as the concept of a "new type of democracy" imply the abandonment of the theory of the "proletarian revolution" and of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", thus entailing a reformulation of the "ultimate aim", if not its abandonment altogether' (p. 157). See also Izzo, 'Dalla territorialità all'industrialismo: la democrazia oltre lo Stato nei "Quaderni del carcere"', included in Izzo 2009, pp. 147–82.

> educated to adhere to – must show in their respective interior life that they have assimilated as principles of moral conduct those rules that in the state are legal obligations. Within the parties, necessity has already become freedom; herein lies the source of the enormous political value (that is, the value of political leadership) of the internal discipline of a party and hence the value of such discipline as a yardstick for assessing the potential for growth of the various parties. From this point of view, the parties can be seen as schools of state life. Components of party life: character (resistance to the urges of superseded cultures), honor (fearless will in upholding the new type of culture and life), dignity (awareness of striving for a higher goal), etc.[46]

This represents Gramsci's specific understanding of the oft-discussed 'democratic centralism', as formulated in Notebook 9, § 68 (July–August 1932):

> In parties representing socially subaltern groups, the element of stability represents the organic need to ensure that hegemony does not belong to privileged groups, but to the progressive forces, those organically progressive with respect to other forces that are allied but composed of and oscillating between the old and the new. In any event, what is important to note is that in the manifestations[47] of bureaucratic centralism the situation evolves due to the lack of initiative; that is, due to the political primitiveness of the peripheral forces, even when these are homogeneous with the hegemonic territorial group. Especially with international territorial organisms, the emergence of such situations is extremely harmful and dangerous. Democratic centralism is an elastic formula that lends itself to many 'incarnations'; it exists because it is continually interpreted and continually adapted to necessity, and it consists in the critical search for that which is equal in the apparent dissimilarity and distinct and opposite in the apparent uniformity, and in organizing and closely connecting that which is similar, but in a way that this organization and connection should appear as an 'inductive', experimental practical necessity and not the result of a rationalistic, deductive, abstract procedure;

46 It is in this sense that, as stated in the subsequent § 99, modern political parties are divided into medieval-style 'factions'.

47 The C text of Notebook 13, § 36 (SPN, 185–90), which, moreover, is considerably more concise with respect to the first draft, includes the significant clarification: 'unhealthy'. On this entire question see again below, Part 2, Chapter 5, § 2.

> that is, produced by 'pure' intellectuals. This continual effort to distinguish between the 'international' and 'unitary' in the national and local reality represents, in reality, the concrete political operation, the merely productive activity of historical progress. This effort requires an organic unity between theory and practice, between intellectual strata and the masses, between governors and governed. The formulae of unity and federation lose much of their meaning from this point of view; they instead produce their poison in the 'bureaucratic' conception, according to which in reality unity does not exist, only superficially calm and 'muta' stagnant swamps; neither does federation exist, only sacks of potatoes; that is, the mechanical juxtaposition of individual 'units' without any interrelationship.

On the unbreakable link between the national and international elements, Gramsci had already spoken; he would return to this topic in § 68 of Notebook 14 (February 1933; SPN, 240–1), commenting on a

> work (in the form of questions and answers) by Joseph Vissarionovitch [Stalin] dating from September 1927: it deals with certain key problems of the science and art of politics. The problem which seems to me to need further elaboration is the following: how, according to the philosophy of praxis (as it manifests itself politically) – whether as formulated by its founder [Marx] or particularly as restated by its most recent great theoretician [Lenin] – the international situation should be considered in its national aspect. The internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is 'original' and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. To be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, *but* the point of departure is 'national' – and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. *Yet*[48] the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, it is necessary to study accurately the combination of national forces which the international class [the proletariat]

48 The added italics here and below are meant to underscore the importance of the contrastive correlative conjunction *but … yet*, to be interpreted not as a sign of Gramsci's oscillations in this regard but of the need to emphasise the connection, more than one of the two terms in the dichotomy, as instead Stalin and Trotsky did, thereby breaking the organic unity in Lenin's thought and strategy.

> will have to lead and develop, in accordance with the international perspective and directives [i.e. those of the Comintern]. The leading class is in fact only such if it accurately interprets this combination – of which it is itself a component and precisely as such is able to give the movement a certain direction, within certain perspectives. It is on this point, in my opinion, that the fundamental disagreement between Leo Davidovitch [Trotsky] and Vissarionovitch [Stalin] as interpreter of the majority movement [Bolshevism] really hinges. The accusations of nationalism are inept if they refer to the nucleus of the question. If one studies the majoritarians' [Bolsheviks'] struggle from 1902 up to 1917, one can see that its originality consisted in purging internationalism of every vague and purely ideological (in a pejorative sense) element, to give it a realistic political content. *It is in the concept of hegemony that those exigencies which are national in character are knotted together; one can well understand how certain tendencies either do not mention such a concept, or merely skim over it. A class that is international in character has – in as much as it guides social strata which are narrowly National* (*intellectuals*)*, and indeed frequently even less than national: particularistic and municipalistic* (*the peasants*) *– to 'nationalise' itself in a certain sense. Moreover, this sense is not a very narrow one either, since before the conditions can be created for an economy that follows a world plan, it is necessary to pass through multiple phases in which the regional combinations* (*of groups of nations*) *may be of various kinds. Furthermore, it must never be forgotten that historical development follows the laws of necessity until the initiative has decisively passed over to those forces which tend towards construction in accordance with a plan of peaceful and solitary division of labour*. [italics added]

The link between internal and international hegemony[49] is reaffirmed and extended in Notebook 15, § 5 (February 1933; FS, 219–23): 'Just as, in a certain sense, in a given state history is the history of the ruling classes, so, on a world scale, history is the history of the hegemonic states'.[50] This is all the more true

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49 Giuseppe Vacca has touched several times on the prevalence of the 'supranational and global horizon' in Gramsci's conception of hegemony, most recently in the above-cited Vacca and Rossi 2007, in particular Chapter 3. On the 'special attention given the national-international link as a permanent feature of Gramsci's thought' dating to the Great War, see Panaccione 2008, p. 97 and *passim*, the entire essay.

50 A similar discourse can be found in the subsequent § 18 (April–May 1933; SPN, 269–70), in which Gramsci includes an explicit reference to the above-cited text.

for the history of the national unification processes under the guidance of a dominant regional state, as Gramsci repeated again § 59 (June–July 1933; SPN, 104–6):

> The important thing is to analyze more profoundly the significance of a 'Piedmont'-type function in passive revolutions – i.e., the fact that a State replaces the local social groups in leading a struggle of renewal. It is one of the cases in which these groups have the function of 'domination' without that of 'leadership': dictatorship without hegemony. The hegemony will be exercised by a part of the social group over the entire group, and not by the latter over other forces in order to give power to the movement, radicalise it, etc., on the 'Jacobin' model.

Concerning this topic, Gramsci once again developed a theme contained in Notebook 1, in particular § 46 (not yet reappearing in § 27 of Notebook 19, written beginning in mid-1934; SPN, 102–4), intending to valorise in Notebook 17, § 9 (September–November 1933, CW 147–9) the figure of Gioberti in that, unlike Mazzini, for example, in the *Rinnovamento*

> [he] shows himself to be a genuine Jacobin, at least in theory and in the given situation in Italy. The element of this Jacobinism can be broadly summed up thus: In the affirmation of the political and military hegemony of Piedmont which ought, as a religion, to be what Paris was for France … 2) Gioberti albeit vaguely, has the concept of the Jacobin 'national-popular', of political hegemony, namely the alliance between bourgeoisie-intellectuals (*ingegno*) and the people. This holds for economics (and Gioberti's economic ideas are vague but interesting) and for literature (culture), where his ideas are clearer and more concrete since not so much hangs in the balance.[51]

Moreover, the centrality of the party's role in the struggle for hegemony makes the relation between the structural and superstructural levels even less mechanical, anticipating, as stated in Notebook 11, § 53 (written between August and December 1932; SPN, 370), 'the beginning of an historical phase of a new type in which necessity and freedom have organically interpenetrated and there will be no more social contradictions, so that the only dialectic will be that of the

51 Gramsci had already dealt with the hegemonic attempt of Gioberti's *Primato* in Notebook 9, § 101 (May–June 1932), as well as in the section immediately preceding the quoted one.

idea, a dialectic of concepts and no longer of historical forces'. In addition, from § 24 of Notebook 7 (February 1931), Gramsci had used the concept of hegemony in order to combat 'the assumption (put forward as an essential postulate of historical materialism) that one can present and explain every political and ideological fluctuation as a direct expression of the structure'. Thus, in § 18 of Notebook 13 (SPN, 158–67), which differs from the first draft of Notebook 4, § 38, where he had written that 'hegemony is *political but also and above all economic*, it has its *material base* in the decisive function exercised by the *hegemonic group* in the decisive core of economic activity', Gramsci had stated that 'for though hegemony is *ethical-political*, *it must also be economic*, must necessarily *be based* on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity',[52] concluding that 'an analysis of the balance of forces – at all levels – can only culminate in the sphere of hegemony and ethico-political relations'.

Starting with § 38 of Notebook 4, Gramsci intensified his criticism of all economistic interpretations of historical materialism, thereafter targeting in the *Notebooks* Bukharin's 'sociology', criticism of which became increasingly bitter as he realised how widespread this view was and the obstacle it represented to the achievement of ideological hegemony by the philosophy of praxis. Unlike what he wrote, for example, in § 14 of Notebook 4 (May–August 1930) – 'historical materialism is not subjected to hegemonies, it has itself started to exercise a hegemony over the old intellectual world' – in Notebook 16, § 9 (SPN, 388–99) he instead recognised, changing his words from the A text in Notebook 4, § 3, that it

> is still going through its populist phase: creating a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing; it requires a long process, with actions and reactions, coming together and drifting apart and the growth of very numerous and complex new formations. It is the conception of a subaltern social group, deprived of historical initiative, in continuous but

52 The italics are added and intend to underscore the main differences between the two passages, which involve Gramsci's increasing anti-economism, whose development is even more evident from a comparison between the two drafts of Notebook 1, § 73 and Notebook 23, § 40 (CW, 171–3) (the italics again indicate the variations in meaning) which, chronologically speaking, are practically poles apart (February–March 1930 vs. the second half of 1934); to say that 'up to the sixteenth century … Florence exerted a cultural hegemony, *because it exerted an economic hegemony*' is, in fact, quite different than saying 'until the 16th-century Florence exerted a cultural hegemony, *linked to its commercial and financial hegemony*'.

> disorganic expansion, unable to go beyond a certain qualitative level, which still remains below the level of the possession of the State and of the real exercise of hegemony over the whole of society which alone permits a certain organic equilibrium in the development of the intellectual group.

6 The Sources of Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony

From what we have seen so far, it is clear that for Gramsci it was not a question of going beyond horizons of Marxism but rather of returning to its original roots, purifying it of the 'residues of mechanistic thinking' (Notebook 8, § 169) which still 'encrust[ed]' it. Hence his attributing, beginning in § 38 of Notebook 4, the origin of the concept of hegemony to Lenin; in fact, this concept

> should be regarded as Ilyich's greatest contribution to Marxist philosophy, to historical materialism: an original and creative contribution. In this respect, Ilyich advanced Marxism not only in political theory and economics but also in philosophy (that is, by advancing political theory, he also advanced philosophy).[53]

His views are even more categorical in Notebook 7, § 33 (perhaps from February 1931),[54] where he considers the relationship between Marx and Lenin, defining them as the Jesus Christ and St. Paul, respectively, of historical materialism: 'I have referred elsewhere to the philosophical importance of the concept and

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53 This thesis is reaffirmed in text C of Notebook 10, II, § 12 (May 1932; SPN, 365–6), where he added the follow explanation: 'The realisation of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge: it is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact. In Crocean terms: when one succeeds in introducing a new morality in conformity with a new conception of the world, one finishes by introducing the conception as well; in other words, one determines a reform of the whole of philosophy'. For a discussion of the relation between Gramsci's and Lenin's conception of hegemony see again Francioni 1984, pp. 154–7 and the bibliography it contains; on the possible other inspirational sources for Gramsci, see instead Prestipino 2002, pp. 234–8 and the relative notes.

54 Based on Gramsci's sources Francioni had determined the date of §§ 23–32 as February, and of §§ 42–8 as November, but he had not managed to identify a more precise timeline for §§ 33–41 (February–November). A recent examination of the manuscript nevertheless has allowed him to identify consistencies in the graphical features of the draft of §§ 29–33 and a variation in the *ductus* of the passage from § 33 to § 34, that which, in his view, would justify the date of February 1931 also for § 33 (dates communicated by Francioni).

fact of hegemony, attributable to Ilyich. The realization of hegemony means the real critique of a philosophy, its real dialectic'. This statement is also repeated in § 35, where Gramsci maintains that 'one can affirm that Ilyich's theorization and realization of hegemony[55] was also a great "metaphysical" event'.

The explanation for this statement, purposely paradoxical, is found in one of the first notes of the Third Series of the *Notes on Philosophy*: § 169 of Notebook 8 (November 1931):

> *Unity of theory and practice*. The average worker has a practical activity but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his activity in and understanding of the world; indeed, his theoretical consciousness can be 'historically' in conflict with his activity. In other words, he will have two theoretical consciousnesses: one that is implicit in his activity and that really unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the world and a superficial, 'explicit' one that he has inherited from the past. The practical-theoretical position, in this case, cannot help but be part of a hegemonic force (that is, political consciousness) that is the first stage on the way to greater self-awareness, namely, on the way to unifying practice and theory. The unity of theory and practice is not a mechanical fact; it is, rather, a historical process, the elementary and primitive phase of which consists in the sense of being 'distinct', 'apart', and 'independent'. This is why I pointed out elsewhere that development of the concept of hegemony represented a great 'philosophical' as well as a political-practical advance. Nevertheless, in the new development of historical materialism, the probing of the concept of the *unity* of theory and practice has only just begun; there are still residues of mechanistic thinking. People still speak of theory as a 'complement' of practice, almost as an

55 *Theorisation and realisation*: The reference here is evidently to the pre-1917 theories of Lenin as well as to his subsequent political works, in particular the NEP: ignoring or in any event underestimating this and other explicit and univocal formulations (which should be interpreted in light of the precise reconstruction by Di Biagio 2008, pp. 379–402), has undoubtedly misled the likes of Franco Lo Piparo, who, in the above-cited book (Lo Piparo 1979) had searched only (or mainly) elsewhere for the origin of the Gramscian category of hegemony, finding it, on the one hand, in the Ascolian concept of 'linguistic prestige' introduced to Gramsci by the university professor Bartoli, and on the other in the Weberian concept of 'legitimate power', themes that, together with others, starting with Gramsci's meeting-conflict with Croce before and after his imprisonment, clearly contributed to enriching and clarifying (*overdetermining*) his conception of hegemony without, however, excluding its Leninist derivation (*determination in the last instance*).

> accessory, etc. I think that in this case, too, the question should be formulated historically, that is, as an aspect of the question of the intellectuals.[56]

Observations along these lines are also, and even more clearly, found in the second draft of some of the passages just mentioned,[57] almost as if to reaffirm those in the 1 March 1924 issue of the *Ordine Nuovo* that commemorated the just deceased Bolshevik leader,[58] who was accorded the historical merit of being

> the first to have developed, in the international history of the class struggle, the idea of the hegemony of the proletariat and posed the main revolutionary problems, in a practical manner, which Marx and Engels had theoretically foreseen.[59]

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56 This section was copied almost word for word in the lengthy text C in Notebook 11, § 12 (June–July 1932; SPN, 323–43). The role of paradigmatic representative of Marxism's train of thought fell in this field as well to Bukharin. As Gramsci would write in the subsequent § 13 in the same notebook (SPN, 419–25), which was significantly modified with respect to Notebook 8, § 175 (November 1931): 'The first mistake of the *Popular Manual* is that it starts, at least implicitly, from the assumption that the elaboration of an original philosophy of the popular masses is to be opposed to the great systems of traditional philosophy and the religion of the leaders of the clergy – i.e. the conception of the world of the intellectuals and of high culture. In reality these systems are unknown to the multitude and have no direct influence on its way of thinking and acting. This does not mean of course that they are altogether without influence but it is influence of a different kind. These systems influence the popular masses as an external political force, an element of cohesive force exercised by the ruling classes and therefore an element of subordination to an external hegemony. This limits the original thought of the popular masses in a negative direction, without having the positive effect of a vital ferment of interior transformation of what the masses think in an embryonic and chaotic form about the world and life'.

57 See, for example, the text from Notebook 10, II, § 12 (May 1932; SPN, 365–6), quoted in note 53 above.

58 Even though not the first writing by Gramsci in which the term *hegemony* appears (it had already appeared in several 1919 articles on the strengthening of the Anglo-American domination of the international scene after the First World War and was to become part of the political vocabulary of the Italian Communists, since it was found, for example, in a 1922 letter by Bordiga to the Comintern Secretary, reproduced in Gramsci 2009b, vol. 1, p. 339, which speaks of 'hégemonie du P.C. sur le prolétariat italien'), the text in question undoubtedly represents the starting point for considerations destined to continue until 1926, when they would be presented in the *Notebooks*.

59 Gramsci 1924, p. 3; cf. also the editorial *Leader* (now found in SPW II, 209–12), as well as numerous other writings from that period. For a less extemporaneous consideration of

In this regard it has been claimed that the Lenin Gramsci has in mind here is 'a Lenin very different from the one who for many years has gone through hard internal struggles with fractions of Russian social democracy … who no longer has any orthodox position to defend and who instead theorizes the need for a new and open investigation';[60] for example, the Lenin that stated

> politics is a concentrated expression of economics … Politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism … without a correct political approach to the matter the given class will be unable to stay on top, *and*, *consequently*, will be incapable of solving *its production problem* either.[61]

In any event, as with the structure-superstructure dialectic, regarding hegemony one can once again speak, therefore, of a sort of 'return' to the topics of his youth, in particular from 1916–19, even though filtered through the nearly two decades of subsequent personal and historical experiences. This return is above all, as has been observed several times, a return to Marx, even as regards a deeper analyis of the topic of hegemony: in Notebook 10, defined as a 'sort of "fourth series" of the *Notes on Philosophy*' ('even if only from a formal point of view … since none of the three series has the compactness and unity of inspiration revealed in the notebook on Croce, even in the organization of its writing'),[62] and in particular in § 41.x (August–December 1932; FS, 399–401), Gramsci concludes, in fact (with changes with respect to the first draft) that already in Marx 'there is contained in a nutshell the ethico-political aspect of politics or theory of hegemony and consent, as well as the aspect of force and

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the theme of hegemony in the pre-imprisonment writings of Gramsci, see the essays by Vacca 2008 and Giasi 2008b.

60 Paggi 1984, p. 18.

61 V.I. Lenin, *Once again on the Trade Unions* (1921), cited in Paggi 1984, p. 31. Even according to Frosini, 'contrary to what has often been said, the notion of hegemony in Gramsci is not at all in large part the return to the thought of the Lenin of 1902–1905 (from *What is to Be Done* to *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*), but to the 1921–1923 texts, in which … hegemony in fact becomes the recognition of the fact that the construction of socialism was not truly a political-administrative procedure nor concerned with a gradual influx of structural determination, but a fact from top to bottom *political* …; that is, which was played out entirely in its decisive crux on the level of the "superstructures"' (Frosini 2001, p. 68). For an overall reconsideration of the relation between Gramsci and Lenin on this question, in light of the various sources, see Di Biagio 2008, in particular pp. 400 ff.

62 Francioni and Frosini, 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 10', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 14, p. 4.

of economics'.[63] This return leads, in turn, to a non-neutral interpretation of Marx himself, who is no longer the 'encrusted' Marx of positivism taken from the vulgate of the Second and Third International but 'the author of concrete political and historical works' (Notebook 7, § 24, February 1931).

What is clear is that until the end of his tormented prison reflections Gramsci wanted to remain faithful to the spirit, if not certainly to the letter, of his two authors. In fact, to judge to what extent the evolution of his theory of hegemony, or better yet, its translation into an extremely diverse political-historical reality such as that of fascist Italy's during the 1930s (where, as Vacca states in his recent essay, the problem is no longer the *hegemony of the proletariat* but the *civil hegemony*) had in reality gone *beyond* (some have maintained *against*) Marx and Lenin, is beyond the scope of the present study.

7 A (Re)definition of Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony

As noted above, around mid-1935 Gramsci's creative work, which had already slowed significantly and was limited by worsening health conditions, was definitively interrupted. Having examined the diachronic interpretation of the *Notebooks*, it is now appropriate to focus on several key, though provisional, points concerning the concept of *hegemony* Gramsci appears to have arrived at during his long and tormented prison reflections. In other words, it is legitimate to superimpose the synchronic level on the diachronic one analysed until now in order to understand the elements of continuity as well as the innovation in his thinking. Therefore, while reaffirming the earlier considerations regarding the 'fluid' nature of his theoretical-political categories and thus accepting the risk that any single statement 'after being checked must be radically corrected, since the contrary of what is written is what turns out to be true' (referring to Gramsci's *Warning* introducing Notebook 11), as well as the risk of repeating concepts that have already become part of the Gramscian *vulgate*, it can be stated that:

The 'strong' meaning of *hegemony* Gramsci adopted in a series of key notes in the *Notebooks*, with an explicit reference to *Lenin's use* of the term [Q 4, § 38],[64] which in turn represented the *translation* (given the changed historico-

63 Notebook 10, § 42.x (August–December 1932), which contains changes to text A of Notebook 4, § 56, in which Gramsci limits himself to commenting on Croce's well-known definition of Marx as the 'Machiavelli of the proletariat'.

64 Hereafter, the notebook and section containing the first or the most perspicuous formu-

political conditions) of *Marx's doctrine* of the *permanent revolution* [Q 8, § 52], is synonymous with *political leadership*, sometimes joined to, sometimes opposed to *domination*, *coercion* [Q 1, § 44], or, in a perhaps more meaningful sense, represents a linking element between the moment of *consent* and that of *force* (*civil* or *political hegemony* [Q 7, § 83], connected and not opposed to ideologico-cultural or *intellectual* hegemony) [Q 13, § 26].

Hegemonic functions [Q 7, § 90] are thus found at every level of political, national and international life, in the areas of historical reconstruction, the analysis of the present situation, and the planning of future action: there exists the hegemony of a geographical or territorial entity within a nation (*city-country*, *North-South relations*, etc.) [Q 1, § 44], of one nation over a group of nations, a continent or the entire world [Q 9, § 132];[65] of a class of a *fundamental social group* over subordinate classes [Q 1, § 44], as well as, within each of these, the hegemony of groups, parties in particular [Q 5, § 127]. In a broader sense one can use the concept of hegemony in a linguistic, anthropological, psychological sense, etc.

Hegemony is exerted through *apparatuses* [Q 1, § 48], which can be either *public*, that is, belonging to the sphere of the *state* (the school in its various levels and types [Q 1, § 46]; the fundamental authorities: at the level of the goverment, parliament, judiciary and police [Q 6, § 81]), or *private*, belonging to the sphere of *civil society* [Q 4, § 49] (political, trade union, cultural, charitable organisations, etc.; religious groups, the daily or periodical press; etc.).[66]

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lation of the particular meaning of the concept in question will be indicated in square brackets.

65 'Is it still possible in the modern world that one country can exert cultural hegemony over others? Or has the world already become so unified in its economic-social structure that a country, if it can "chronologically" be capable of having an innovation, is still not able to preserve its "political monopoly" and thus must use this monopoly to develop a hegemonic foundation? What significance can nationalism thus have today? Is this possible only as economic-financial "imperialism" but not as "civil primacy" or politico-intellectual hegemony?'. It is significant that the term *imperialism*, which, moreover, occurs only a few other times in the *Notebooks* and is substantially extraneous to the analysis of the contemporary reality of Gramsci dating from his writing from 1916 to 1918 (cf. Gualtieri 2007), appears here in inverted commas.

66 It should nevertheless be kept in mind that, even from this point of view, the distinction between the sphere of the state and that of the civil society is more methodical than organic, as can be seen from the example of the letter to Tania dated 7 September 1931, in which school is included within 'the so-called private organizations' together with church and trade unions (LP II, 65–8).

Thanks to these apparatuses, in liberal-democratic parliamentary regimes hegemony is maintained as long as possible, in *normal forms* [Q 1, § 48], through a wise union of force and consensus historically achieved by a *separation of powers* and the 'free' formation and expression of *public opinion* [Q 6, § 81]. In situations of a *crisis of hegemony* (following ruinous wars or the sudden appearance on the political scene of new masses) [Q 13, § 23], this does not exclude, but in fact implies, recourse to more or less direct and violent coercion.

In more *primitive* situations, which Gramsci defines as *economic-corporative* [Q 8, § 185], where the hegemonic apparatuses are still scarce or even entirely absent, the link between economic domination and politico-ideological hegemony (if one is still allowed to use this term in similar contexts) is direct and mechanical, as occurs, for example, in the United States, where *the hegemony is born in the factory* [Q 1, § 61], and inevitably in the slow transition to the regulated society, an outcome Gramsci believes still possible (though not automatic) in the Soviet Union [Q 6, § 136].[67]

A crucial role as *bureaucrats* or *deputies* of hegemony is played by *intellectuals* (in the broad sense, from the junior clerk to the great philosopher, the sacristan to the pope, which obviously does not exclude a precise internal hierarchy): *organic* intellectuals, referring to the class that is, or desires to become, dominant, whose role is to gain the maximum spontaneous consensus from the subordinate classes, imposing on them, thanks to their personal prestige, their own conception of the world as the universal one, thus making this become a *common sense*, *national-popular* conception; or traditional intellectuals who, without any relations with the world of production, are more easily conditioned by the political authority [Q 19, § 24: it is Croce who is led by Giolitti, and not vice versa], in addition to being more tied to their *economic-corporative* caste interests [Q 12, § 1].

For their part the leaders organic to the subaltern classes must undertake along with them a struggle to achieve *hegemony* first and foremost over their own class, taking it away from the dominant class, and then gradually over the allied and adversarial classes, until they gain leadership over the entire social process [Q 9, § 68]. The forms this new hegemony will take on compared to the bourgeois hegemony are not predictable; however, they will certainly be radically different.

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67 As Baratta 2007 notes (p. 44), while in § 14 of Notebook 3, Gramsci speaks of what will happen 'when victory is secured', in the rewritten Notebook 25, § 2 (SPN, 54–5), 'he more cautiously states … "when a historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success"'.

The *theoretical apparatus* of this struggle is represented by *Marxism*, a doctrine that not only has liberated itself (or must do so [Q 16, §9]) from the hegemony of the 'bourgeois' philosophies (neo-idealism, Kantism, positivism, pragmatism, and so on) – a process that, at the subjective level, goes by the name of *self-consciousness* [Q 8, §169] – but which tends in turn to impose its own hegemony, despite itself, on its own most prestigious leaders, who in fact would like to combat it (emblematic here is the case of Croce and his 'tricks' such as the *ethico-political history*) [Q 6, §10]. In this sense *historical materialism*, purged of its short-lived elements, *mechanism* and *determinism*, is or becomes a *philosophy of praxis*.[68]

The conquest, maintenance and gradual extension of hegemony to the subaltern social groups requires, at least in the more advanced states (in which the dominant hegemonic apparatuses are too strong to be defeated by a *war of movement*), a long *war of position* [Q 6, §138], at the end of which there is an even longer transition phase toward the *regulated society*, which leads to the reabsorption of the political society into the civil one, to the end of the distinction among classes and thus the end of the state, at least as understood in the sense of an instrument of domination [Q 6, §88] (passage from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom, *hegemony* finally understood only as *leadership*). During this phase more advanced forms of *democracy* are tried with respect to the parliamentary phase [Q 8, §191], which, as shown by the first signs of bureaucratisation and involution from Soviet experience under Stalin (the *hypocrisy of self-criticism*, the *black parliamentarism*, and other more or less 'Aesopic' formulae) [Q 14, §§74–6], are nevertheless not without the risk of leading to the establishment of *totalitarian regimes*, which, however, Gramsci distinguishes, in that they are *progressive*, from purely *regressive*, even reactionary ones represented by Nazi-Fascism [Q 6, §136]. The *party* represents the *practical apparatus* made use of by the subaltern classes in their struggles until the definitive prevalence of the international dimension over the national one in the political contest [Q 14, §68]. The party is understood as the *modern*

68 It is known that after a certain point in time this is the expression Gramsci systematically (even with some significant exceptions) substitutes for the term *Marxism*, as a result often using the circumlocution 'founder of the philosophy of praxis' to refer to Marx. As several people have emphasised, for example, Ciliberto in 'La fabbrica dei Quaderni', in Ciliberto 1982, p. 273, these are clearly not 'accidental variations, understandable only in light of "external" considerations, of his personal security in prison. Deep down something essential is underway: a relation with national tradition, an interpretation of Marx's thinking'. However, see Frosini 2010, pp. 50–111; Izzo, 'Filosofia della prassi e concezione della modernità', in Izzo 2009, pp. 75–97.

Prince, and as such is able, in turn, to appropriately use the instruments of consensus and domination [Q 5, § 127]; instruments it avails itself of above all to preserve its unity and discipline (*organic* or *democratic* centralism vs. *bureaucratic* centralism) [Q 9, § 68].

CHAPTER 3

Regulated Society

1 Philosophy – Politics – Economics

> If these three activities are the necessary constituent elements of the same conception of the world, there must necessarily be, in their theoretical principles, a convertibility from one to the others and a reciprocal translation into the specific language proper to each constituent element. Any one is implicit in the others, and the three together form a homogeneous circle. From these propositions (still in need of elaboration) there derive for the historian of culture and of ideas a number of research criteria and critical canons of great significance.[1]

Continuing in the attempt to (re)interpret Gramsci *according to* Gramsci, another fundamental concept in his thought will be analysed: the *regulated society*, through which several crucial elements of his economic theories will be presented, which clearly represent one of the aspects of the *Notebooks* which was late in being explored. It is enough to note that, of the more than 7,000 works included in the first edition of the *Gramsci Bibliography* edited by John Cammet, only 29 were listed in the *Index of Topics* under the entry of *Economic Theory*, which was one of the smallest in the *Index*.[2] Behind this scarce interest in this topic was probably the widespread view – at times explicit,[3] more often

1 Notebook 11, § 65 (SPN, 403–4), written between August and December 1932, reproducing almost to the letter the A text of Notebook 4, § 46 (October–November 1930), entitled, in fact, *Philosophy-politics-economics*. Clearly, as Gramsci himself adds, 'such a criterion of historical judgment contains many dangers of dilettantism and it is necessary to be very cautious in applying it'.

2 Cf. Cammett 1991, p. 440.

3 It should be kept in mind that Sraffa, when asked in 1947 his opinion on publishing the economic notes in the planned thematic edition of the *Notebooks*, edited by Palmiro Togliatti and Felice Platone, expressed strong perplexity, proposing not to include any of them and pointing out that 'on the whole [these] are not up to the level of the rest of the work', which was to include in fact *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* (cit. by Lunghini, 'Introduzione', in Gramsci 1994, p. XXX and note; cf. Badaloni 1992, pp. 43–50, which posits that at the basis of Sraffa's opinion of Gramsci the economist there was a substantial difference of views on the relation between Ricardo and Marx and on the problem of the decline in the

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only implicit in all the analyses of Gramsci's work on this question – of a lessened importance (qualitative and quantitative) of the notes dealing with economics, both in absolute terms and relative to other aspects of his thinking, above all the philosophic and political thought explored above, along with aesthetic-literary, historiographical and strictly cultural themes, as was already clear from the thematic organisation of the first edition of the *Notebooks*.[4]

Nevertheless, considering only the period of imprisonment,[5] Gramsci's interest in economics is revealed as early as 1926 (only one month after his arrest and more than two years before he effectively began drafting the *Notebooks*), as shown in a letter to Tania that preceded by several months the letter that presented his initial 'work plan' and in which the author, who had just been confined to the island of Ustica, expressed his intention 'to feel well in order to feel always better in health' and 'to study German and Russian with method and persistence', along with '[studying] economics and history'.[6] It is true that economic topics (similar to other fundamental sectors of Gramsci's thinking), absent from the subsequent plan of his prison writings, including the beginning of the *First Notebook*, are dealt with systematically only starting with the large 'block' of notes in Notebook 1, written between February and March 1930, and are continued in the numerous 'miscellaneous' notes, in particular in Notebook 6 – for the most part under the rubric *Past and present*, demonstrating the persistent lack of a nucleus of independent investigation – culminating with a veritable 'explosion' of *Jottings of economics* (rubric title appearing first in Notebook 8) and *Points to Reflect* on the same topic in Notebook 10. There then followed important developments in various B texts in Notebooks 14, 15 and 17, in addition to marginal additions to the C texts in the last few 'special' notebooks with respect to the A texts from the initial notebooks.[7]

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rate of profit). On the relationship between Sraffa and Gramsci see Auletta 2008, pp. 485–509; Naldi 2008, pp. 511–27; Rossi and Vacca 2007, in particular pp. 154–7.

4 In fact, the book entitled *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, published by Einaudi in 1948, would be followed (published by the same publishing house) by the following books: *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, *Il Risorgimento*, *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo Stato moderno* (all in 1949), *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (1950), and *Passato e presente* (1951).

5 A good anthology on Gramsci's economic writings before his imprisoment can be found in Gramsci 1994, pp. 3–89.

6 LP I, 39–43 (9 December 1926).

7 On the slow emergence of interest in 'economic matters' in the *Notebooks*, which, moreover, is not unlike the development of the topics analysed in the preceding chapters, cf. Maccabelli 1998, pp. 73 ff.

It is for this reason, according to Giorgio Lunghini – to whom the merit goes for once again focusing attention on thematic aspects – that one can find throughout the *Notebooks*, if not a systematic economic theory then at least a 'critique of political economics' (which, moreover, the author reminds us 'is the true title of Marx's *Capital*'); 'an eloquent but theoretically approximate instrument' (perhaps it would have been better to say *conceptually approximate*, given the 'fluidity' of Gramsci's lexis, which has been noted several times above), understood above all as a critique 'of the orthodox perspective, that view of the economy and of the society it represents as if these were guided by a natural order'.[8] Thus it is impossible to avoid dealing with a field of thought which is fundamental for any thinker who desired, as Gramsci certainly did until the end, to be considered a Marxist. In fact, he himself states in Notebook 4, § 39 (October 1930) that

> a systematic treatment of historical materialism cannot ignore any of the constituent parts of Marxism. But in what sense? It should deal with the general philosophical part in its entirety, and furthermore it should also be a theory of history, a theory of philosophy, a theory of economics.

Therefore, having denied the 'primacy' of the economic *structure* over the politico-ideological *superstructures* and posited the decisive role of individual and collective actions in achieving and preserving social, political and cultural *hegemony*, during and after the gaining of state power over the levers of production by the historically progressive forces, it now remains to understand how Gramsci thought it possible to analyse and above all intervene in the economic sphere, which, even with all the distinctions noted heretofore, remains, along the lines of Engels (and even more so Marx), '"in the final analysis" the mainspring of history'.[9]

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8 Lunghini, 'Introduzione', in Gramsci 1994, pp. IX–XI; as will be shown below, Gramsci defines such a view of the economy as 'pure'.

9 In fact, there is no alternative, as Gramsci reminds us in Notebook 8, § 77 (March 1932), in 'choos[ing] between the economic "final analysis" or the stolen bucket "final analysis"'. It has already been observed that 'this topic of the *function* of economic thought lying within general political thought could lead one to believe in a lack of feeling for the former, a sort of lack of understanding or exclusion of it by Gramsci: as if the primacy of politics, or the project of hegemonic construction, gave primacy to one disciplinary field as opposed to another. This hypothesis would in itself be legitimate'; however, every time 'the context tells us otherwise' (Calabi 1988, pp. 162 ff.). Moreover, proof of interest in the economy, and in particular in the Soviet revolutionary experiment, is provided by the repeated instances

It is not possible here to provide a thorough treatment of Gramsci's complete economic theories – whose very existence should in the first instance be argued and demonstrated;[10] the initial assumption of the following analysis is the same as for the preceding chapters: starting from positions which were substantially aligned with those of the orthodox theories of the Third International at the end of the 1920s (which can be outlined using the theoretical analysis in Bukharin's *Manual* and the political practices of the Soviet leadership under Stalin), during his prison reflections – which was above all the reflection of a defeat, not only the personal one of 'a soldier who had no luck in the immediate struggle',[11] but of the entire Italian and world workers' movement – Gramsci gradually distanced himself from the then-dominant Marxism-Leninism. However, this does not imply accepting a general social-democratic revisionism but rather a return to the original sources of 'the actual historical words' of Lenin and, above all, Marx, as long as these are liberated from the fatal 'encrustrations' from successive interpreters and 'translated' and historicised to adapt them to the new national and international contexts. Similarly, Gramsci's rejection or criticism of several aspects of this theory, in particular as applied in the Soviet Union, does not entail a totally negative judgement regarding the overall revolutionary experience of the first socialist state nor the presumed theoreticians of that experience. This position represented instead a reconsideration of these aspects, which also represented a return to the liberalist and anti-protectionist controversies of his youth (about which 'Einaudi and the Marx of the *Manifesto* represent the main reference points')[12] and thus a rejection of the socialism-statalism equation that would increasingly take hold in Stalin's Soviet Union, which until then had translated into a 'celebration of the virtues of individualism, whose development toward the final level he saw as a necessary presupposition for the transition to socialism',[13] even while Gramsci remained conscious of the fact that

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where the prisoner asked the prison authorities to be allowed to read books and articles on the topic, to go along with such requests by his sister-in-law Tania, starting with the letter at the end of 1926 quoted above.

10 This does not mean that the *Notebooks* are lacking in observations in this regard, beginning with the methodological considerations in Notebook 10, II, § 59 on the epistemological statute of economic science, which will be presented below.

11 This self-definition by Gramsci is found in LP II, 58–9 (24 August 1931).

12 Masella 2008, p. 318.

13 Rapone 2008, p. 41, but see *passim*, entire essay, together with Natoli 2008, in particular pp. 53 ff. and 63–5 on the praise of Anglo-Saxon liberalism as personified by U.S. President Wilson, to the point he defined revolutionary socialism as 'the liberalism of the proletariat'

> free exchange is not contained in socialist doctrine but is intrinsically dependent on the capitalist regime. Socialists are neither liberalists nor protectionists, since in the society they are constructing there can be no competition, neither of classes nor States.[14]

The following page will thus carefully examine the mature Gramsci's writings to ascertain the fundamental elements of this criticism, and then, where possible, outline several characteristic points of his economic thinking.

2 'Importuning the Texts'

The starting point for this examination are several notes in the *Notebooks* which some years back Sergio Caprioglio had drawn attention to, maintaining that, though apparently 'silent', if read with attention 'attest to the interest and critical spirit with which Gramsci made an effort to follow the events in the Soviet Union and the impact of the first Five-Year Plan on Soviet society'.[15] Caprioglio admits to being tempted 'to go further; that is, to search in other places for any sign of Gramsci's thinking' on the topic,[16] limiting himself, however, to several, though brilliant, examples and concluding with an invitation not to be ignored: 'in the difficult writing of the *Prison Notebooks*, the identification and interpretation of Gramsci's sources on the USSR, and more generally his views on the Soviet experiment, represent a field of inquiry still deserving of attention and further analysis'.[17] This attention and analysis would, in the meantime, come from a number of scholars;[18] for the present purposes, while waiting for the

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(ibid., p. 70 ff.; in this regard, see also Savant 2008, pp. 155–74). On *Antonio Gramsci e il liberismo italiano* see also Michelini 2008, pp. 175–96.

14 Gramsci, *Semplici riflessioni*, 19 November 1918 (now in Gramsci 1984, p. 410).

15 Caprioglio 1991, pp. 65 ff.

16 Ibid., p. 69.

17 Ibid., p. 75.

18 Progress in this direction was made by De Domenico 1991, who identified 'Una fonte trascurata dei Quaderni del carcere di Antonio Gramsci: Il "Labour Monthly" del 1931': 'through [this overlooked source] it is likely that Sraffa tried to circumvent the strict prison censorship and pass on first-hand information to Gramsci on the recent developments in the Soviet Union, which moved from the NEP to the planned economy and forced industrialization' (p. 2). De Domenico is in turn critical of Mastroianni 1982, pp. 222–42, which 'gives as certain that the "only source" of information for Gramsci on the philosophical debate begun by Stalin and its conclusion in 1931 was, indirectly, the essay by Mirskij, *Bourgeois History and Historical Materialism*', maintaining instead that 'a source

National Edition of the *Notebooks* to shed further light on the entire question of Gramsci's sources, it is above all important to verify whether or not it is possible to present a picture, even in outline form, of his view of the experience of the first Soviet 'plan', and in general on the principle of the regulation of the economy as a means of overcoming the *empasse* in which, as he wrote in § 34 of Notebook 3, 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born'.

According to Caprioglio, the decisive note in this regard was § 198 from Notebook 6 (December 1931), entitled *Importuning the texts*; that is to say, as Gramsci observed, to 'make texts say more than they really do. This error of philological method occurs also outside philology, in studies and analyses of all aspects of life'. Caprioglio continues: 'The origin of the note is a writing by Paolo Vita-Finzi entitled: *Piani quinquennali ed economia "a piani"*, in the journal "La Cultura"', which Gramsci possessed in prison and certainly read,[19] in particular a passage that observed that 'all the data published in the USSR is dubious, approximate, suspicious, due to the ignorance and bad faith of the peripheral organs' and '*due to the political interest of the Governent and the Party in "importuning the texts"*'.[20] While significant in itself, Caprioglio's thesis is nevertheless gravely invalidated by the fact that the issue of 'La Cultura' containing Vita-Finzi's article was published only in the summer of 1932, and thus subsequent to the writing of the note in Notebook 6.[21] This does mean

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of primary importance … for interpreting the prison writings' is 'a second article by D.P. Mirskij eloquently entitled *The philosophical Discussion in the C.P.S.U. in 1930–31*', from the October 1931 issue of 'Labour Monthly' (p. 5 and note 13). On the importance of the latter article for Gramsci's general theoretical reflections – to which should at least be added the 'the *Economist* abstract about the Five Year Plan', regarding which Gramsci would say: 'I read it in two or three days and I believe that not even one locution escaped me' (LP II, 43–4, June 29, 1931) – Frosini has recently commented in Frosini 2002, pp. 70 ff. In the wake of this reflection in the prison letters see also Rossi and Vacca 2007, p. 36. Finally, of interest are the thoughts of those who maintain that 'one has to ask if Gramsci had in mind', when he stigmatised 'reasoning through statistics', 'the disastrous results of Soviet planning' (Joll 1992, p. 108). An attempt 'at systematically examining the notes in the *Notebooks* … which directly or indirectly refer to post-revolutionary Russia, and as far as possible understanding the development and evolution of Gramsci's increasingly critical thinking on this topic (or better, on the interconnected topics that can be linked to the problem of the USSR)' can be found in Benvenuti and Pons 1999, pp. 93 ff.

19 Caprioglio 1991, p. 66.

20 Vita-Finzi 1932 [not 1931, as indicated by Caprioglio], p. 577, quoted in Caprioglio 1991, p. 68 (italics are Caprioglio's).

21 In fact, the opposite case would make untenable both Francioni's chronology (used throughout the present work) as well as the more general one proposed by Gerratana,

that Gramsci may not have read the article later; in the *Notebooks* he never quotes only the essay by the Italian diplomat but the entire issue, unlike other articles before or after in the same journal.[22] Moreover, the fact the expression *importuning the texts* is placed in inverted commas by both Vita-Finzi and Gramsci would imply that both had taken it from an until-then-unidentified third source, which would constitute the *traît d'union* between the two texts examined here.[23]

However, what is important is that Gramsci, unlike the Italian diplomat and most of his other sources of information on the Soviet experiment, does not reject at all the overall planning experience. This occurs not, as Caprioglio seems to suggest, because Gramsci, even though 'caught between the harsh reality he finds himself in, on the one hand, and anguish, perhaps doubt on the other, still *wants* to hope',[24] but because he holds that the overarching principle of this experience, the regulation of the economy, is indispensable (as well as correct), and not only for a socialist economy. He analyses three applications of this, all partial and for different reasons "impure", though not for this reason less symptomatic: fascist corporativism, Roosevelt's New Deal and Stalin's forced planning.

3 The Regulated Society 'from Utopia to Science'

The conviction regarding the historical superiority of the principle of the regulation of the economy (and of the whole of society) over classical laissez-

which notes that in Notebook 6 'the sources used as Gramsci continued his work … were often not of the same time period of the notebook's writing', concluding that this 'appears to have been started at the end of 1930 and continued until the start of 1932'; moreover, '§ 197 was also written in 1931, according to an incidental notation by Gramsci'. Thus it is difficult to think that, before writing § 198, the author waited another six months, or that the subsequent '§§ 206, 207 and 208 are based on articles from the "Corriere della Sera" of January 7 and 8, 1932' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2387–8), and thus to be assumed to have been written soon after he had read the newspaper, if not even the same day.

22 Cf. *Indice dei periodici citati nei Quaderni*, in particular *Q*, 3147.

23 Moreover, this was a common expression, especially in French; for example, it was cited by Sorel 1908, p. 91, which in turn he had taken from the controversy between Jaurès and Clemenceau. Gramsci might have borrowed the term from there, or from another indirect source, for example, one of Croce's many writings before or during Gramsci's imprisonment.

24 Caprioglio 1991, p. 71 (italics added).

faire liberalism constitutes one of the (very few) firm points of the *Notebooks*. In Notebook 4, § 38 Gramsci states with reference to the latter principle that it

> speculates ignorantly (because of a theoretical error whose sophism is not hard to identify) on the distinction between political society and civil society and mantains that economic activity belongs to civil society and that political society must not intervene in its regulation. But, in reality, the distinction is purely methodological and not organic; in concrete historical life, political society and civil society are a single entity. Moreover, laissez-faire liberalism, too, must be introduced by law, through the intervention of political power: it is an act of will, not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts.

This, moreover, is a view already present in Gramsci's thinking in 1918, when he stated that

> the extent of historical progress is shown by the increasing emphasis on the organizational principle in its origins empty of concrete content. It can be seen by the contraposition to arbitrariness, caprice, and the vague instinct of the formation of solid and democratic hierarchies which are freely constituted with a view to a concrete goal which would be unattainable if it were not sought with all energies banded together.[25]

This tendency was already under way at the start of the twentieth century, but it intensified during the years when Gramsci wrote the *Notebooks*, though not primarily as a response to the crisis in 1929, to the point where one author interpreted the phenomenon as a Polanyan *great transformation*.[26] This favorably influenced Gramsci's opinion of authors from whom, moreover, he is very distant; for example, the so-called 'leftist' fascists (Spirito and Volpicelli above all, linked to the journal *Nuovi studi di diritto, economia e politica*), champions of a corporativism understood (more in words than in facts) as a sort of 'third way' ('proper means' or 'middle road')[27] between capitalist laissez-faire and

25 A. Gramsci, *After the Congress*, 14 September 1918 (now in HPC, 99–101).

26 Cf. for example Boothman 2007, p. 183, and the bibliography therein contained.

27 These self-definitions are quoted in the book by Santomassimo 2006, pp. 121ff., which provides an overall outline of this phenomenon. See also, in this regard, Faucci 1995,

communist collectivism, implying a form of 'strong' government intervention – in the negative sense (limitation of the free market, in particular the labour market) as well as the positive one (regulation of production activity) – in the economy. Some have likened this approach to Keynesianism for the shared decision to remain in the mould of capitalist production, utilising state intervention in the economy to improve the efficiency of the system and block the advent of socialism,[28] interest in which was shown even by many Catholic leaders (at least in the beginning, who could even 'claim the undeniable birthright of the corporativist theme'),[29] as well as by some reformist socialists (Rigola, D'Aragona etc.).[30]

In fact, in Notebook 1, § 135 (February–March 1930) Gramsci started from a position that was very critical of the

> conception of the corporation as an autonomous industrial productive bloc destined to resolve in a modern way the problem of the economic apparatus in an emphatically capitalistic manner, opposing the parasitic elements of society which take an excessively large cut of surplus value, and the so-called 'producers of savings'. The production of savings should, therefore, be a function of the productive bloc itself, through a growth in production at lower costs and through the creation of greater surplus value, which would allow higher wages and thus a larger internal market, workers' savings, and higher profits, and hence greater direct capitalization within firms – and not through the intermediary of the 'producer of savings' who, in reality, devours surplus value.

Gramsci feels this view is erroneous since it does not

> take into account the economic function of the state in Italy and the fact that the corporative regime had its origins in economic policing, not economic revolution … But, such considerations apart, the question

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pp. 523 ff., which takes into account Gramsci's critical observations as well. For a more detailed analysis of the relations between Gramsci and corporativism, see the essays by Maccabelli 2008, pp. 609–30 (cf. also Maccabelli 1998, p. 76: 'the economic annotations in the *Prison Notebooks* would lose … much of their significance if read without considering the methodological dispute initiated by Spirito at the start of the 1930s') and Gagliardi 2008, pp. 631–56.

28 Cf. Macchioro 1970, pp. 628–52; Beccattini 1983, pp. 85–104.

29 Santomassimo 2006, p. 86.

30 Cf. ibid., pp. 98 ff.

arises: the corporations now exist; they create the conditions in which industrial innovation can be introduced on a large scale, because workers can neither oppose it nor can they struggle to be themselves the bearers of this change. The question is fundamental, it is the *hic Rhodus* of the Italian situation: will, then, the corporations become the form of this change, through one of those 'tricks of Providence' which ensure that men unwillingly obey the imperatives of history …? One is necessarily inclined to deny it.[31] The condition described above is one of the conditions, not the only condition or even the most important; it is only *the most important of the immediate conditions*. Americanization requires a specific environment, a specific social structure,[32] and a certain type of state. The state is the liberal state, not in the sense of a liberalism in trade, but in the more essential sense of free initiative and economic individualism, which by spontaneous means, through its own historical development, succeeds in establishing a regime of monopolies. The disappearance of *rentiers* in Italy is a condition of industrial change, not a consequence; the economic-financial policy of the state is the mainspring of this disappearance: amortization of the national debt, registration of securities, direct instead of indirect taxation. This does not seem to be or about to become the direction of current policy. On the contrary. The state is increasing the number of *rentiers* and creating closed social formations. To this day, in fact, the corporative regime has operated to support the tottering positions of the middle classes, not to eliminate them, and through the established interests it creates, it is becoming a machine for the preservation of the status quo rather than a mainspring for forward movement. Why? Because the corporative regime depends upon unemployment, not employment; it protects a certain mininum standard of life for the employed, which would itself collapse and provoke serious social upheavals if there were free competition. Very well: but the corporative regime, dependent from its birth on this extremely delicate situation, the essential equilibrium of which must be maintained at all costs to avoid a tremendous catastrophe, could move ahead with very small imperceptible steps which would modify the social structure without sudden shocks … In any case, the process would be a very long one and, in the meantime,

31 In the C text of Notebook 22, § 6 (written in the second half of 1934; SPN, 289–94), Gramsci would soften his views, writing that 'for the moment one is more inclined to be dubious', testifying to his reassessment of several aspects of corporativism, as revealed in some of the notes below.

32 '([O]r at least a determined intention to create it)', as he added in the second draft.

> new difficulties, new interests will emerge which tenaciously oppose its regular development.[33]

Going further in his investigation, Gramsci nevertheless forms the view that even though 'he would have an easy time revealing the total arbitrariness of Spirito's propositions and his conception of the state' in his controversy against official economic science, either laissez-faire or classical economics (starting with Einaudi), they 'must not be rejected wholesale; there are some real exigencies buried under the hodgepodge of "speculative" words', in particular his 'criticism of traditional economics' and its pretense of being scientific and neutral in leaving any historical and politico-social determination; a controversy shared also with Crocean idealism (though from a very different political viewpoint) with its theory of the 'distincts',[34] as he would write in Notebook 6, § 82 (March 1931).[35] He also makes clear in a preceding note in the same notebook (§ 12 (December 1930)) that in his eyes the utopian nature of the view of Spirito and his companions derived from a 'confusion between the concept of class-state and the concept of regulated society … typical of the middle classes and petty intellectuals, who would be delighted with any form of regulation that prevented intense struggles and violent change; it is a typically reactionary and regressive conception'.[36] In fact,

> as long as the class-state exists, the regulated society cannot exist, other than metaphorically – that is, only in the sense that the class-state, too, is a regulated society. The utopians, insofar as they expressed a critique of the existing society of their time, understood very well that the class-state could not be the regulated society. So much so that in the types of society

33 '[So] as to crush it entirely', as he would say in the C text. Interesting observations on this note can be found in Santomassimo 2006, p. 62 and notes.

34 Cf. Maccabelli 1998, pp. 82 ff., which treats the apparently surprising analogies between Gramsci's criticism of traditional economics and those of Spirito himself, as well as the similarities between these criticisms and the controversy regarding the marginalist paradigm carried forward by Pareto at that time.

35 Francioni dated § 40 to December 1930, based on the sources used by Gramsci, and §§ 75–6 to March 1931; in the absence of other elements he dated §§ 41–74 to somewhere between these two dates. Today he believes the uniformity of the graphical features of these writings allows him to date §§ 75–82 to March (information provided to the author by Francioni). In this regard see also below, note 18 to Part 2, Chapter 5.

36 Interesting views on the historical need for the transition to a regulated society are also found in the subsequent §§ 65 and 88 of Notebook 6.

> depicted in the various utopias, economic equality is put forward as the necessary basis for the projected reform; in this respect, the utopians were not utopians, but concrete political scientists and consistent critics. The utopian character of some of them was due to the fact that they believed it possible to introduce economic equality with arbitrary laws, an act of will, etc. The same concept can be found in other political writers (including the right-wing critics of democracy [...]).

This differs, for example, from what Croce and Einaudi affirmed during those years in their polite *dispute* over laissez-faire and liberalism.[37] From this it followed, as Gramsci wrote in Notebook 8, § 216 (March 1932), that

> the demand for an 'economy based on a plan' – not just on a national level but on a world scale – is interesting in itself, even if the justification for it is purely verbal: it is 'a sign of the times'. It is the expression, albeit still 'utopian', of the developing conditions that call for an 'economy based on a plan'.

Several pages later (§ 221, March–April), he explained the 'comparison [of Gentile's followers] with Bruno Bauer and *The Holy Family*' – assuming a sort of *Spirit & Co*. 'equation': an *'economy based on a plan' = Utopian socialism and/or leftwing Hegelianism : Marx-Engels and scientific socialism* – which, in the corresponding C text (Notebook 11, § 6; FS, 441) he would define as 'the most fruitful in its literary possibilities', one of which was represented by the play on words between 'the empirical man Spirito', 'Spirito – Philosophy' and 'the realm of Spirito (in this case = the Holy Spirit⟨o⟩ and God, father of all men)', which is found in § 82 of Notebook 6 and is clearly inspired by the 'critic of critical criticism' of the Marx-Engelsian *Holy Family* chosen in the *Notebooks* as a model of 'passionately *positive* sarcasm'.[38]

Immediately following (Notebook 8, § 236, from April 1932)[39] Gramsci described fascist corporativism in terms of a 'passive revolution', in that

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37 For a recent discussion on the dispute, see Giordano 2006, pp. 147 ff., and the bibliography cited therein.

38 Notebook 1, § 29.

39 Emblematic here is the fact that a good part of Gramsci's notes on the question were written during 'that year, 1932, which would represent the greatest output, in terms of intensity if not diffusion, of public laws concerning corporativism' (Santomassimo 2006, p. 32 ff.).

> Through a 'reform' process, the economic structure is transformed from an individualistic one to an economy according to a plan (administered economy), where the emergence of an 'intermediate economy' – i.e., an economy in the space between the purely individualistic one and the one that is comprehensively planned – enables the transition to more advanced political and cultural forms without the kinds of radical and destructive cataclysms that are utterly devastating. 'Corporativism' could be – or, as it grows, could become – this form of intermediate economy that has a 'passive character'.[40]

Throughout the *Notebooks* Gramsci would restate several times his criticisms of what he defined as the 'speculative economy of Spirito & Co's group' (Notebook 10, II, § 7; FS, 439), continuing nonetheless to recognise some positive aspects of it in the fact that, even if it 'moves amongst Counter-Reformation concepts and his painstaking efforts intellectually may give rise to a new *City of the Sun*, and in practice to a construction like that of the Jesuits in Paraguay' – a comparison already previously extended to all possible variations of state capitalism (cf. Notebook 7, § 91, December 1931)[41] – 'these abstract developments of thought continue to be dangerous ideological ferments, and block the formation of an ethico-political unity in the ruling class' (Notebook 10, II, § 14, from the second half of May 1932; FS, 464–7). Even more severe was the opinion in Notebook 15, § 39 (May 1933): 'it is clear that Spirito's theory represents a not very brilliant and fruitful bookish Utopia' even if 'in any event the justness of Spirito's intuition should be noted, according to which, given that classism had been overtaken by corporativism and by all forms of regulated and planned economy, the old syndicalist forms that developed from the terrain of classism must be updated'.

In conclusion, if for Gramsci the only positive element in eclectic and demagogic fascist corporativism is that it represented, even if unconsciously, the expression of the historical necessity for the transition of the laissez-faire economy (or at least professed as such, since it is never divested of recurring protectionist temptations) to one regulated and 'administered … according to a plan', for their part Volpicelli and Spirito saw during that same period in Soviet statism the triumph of the corporate idea. In fact 'their writings often included as a privileged interlocutor, explicitly or implicitly, the experience of the first

40 Cf. once again in this regard Voza 2004.

41 It is important to observe that the British leftwing journalist H.N. Brailsford, in his work *How the Soviets Work* (Brailsford 1927, cit. in Flores 1990, p. 49), compares the Soviet experiment to that of the Jesuits in Paraguay.

Soviet five-year plan, which was capable, through its vast production, of considerable though ambiguous influence on the young fascist generations', as well as on 'those in Italy and abroad who were searching for a "third way" between capitalism and communism'.[42] This led him to see in the autocratic Soviet regime 'a sort of "imperfect fascism" whose universal validity had already been subsumed and integrated in a higher form of Italian corporativism',[43] and to emphasise the closer idealistic proximity of Rome to Moscow as opposed to Chicago.[44]

Moreover, others have pointed out that 'the first important attempt at overall total planning and the regulation of social processes and conflicts, referred to as the "corporative experiment" (Gramsci), coincided in Italy with the insistent request for long-term planning and plannability expressed at that time in business circles (Giovanni Agnelli) as well as by economic writers',[45] more or less openly supported by Mussolini himself, at least until the mid-1930s. In short, 'the "corporative experiment" should be classified above all among those "*planiste*" ideas that were so popular in the 1930s. Common to these ideas, beyond all the differences in detail, was the proposal to carry out within a process of change new organisational forms in the way of producing and in the work process, as well as in the system of political power in industrial society'.[46] In any event, this was the perception of foreign observers who certainly could not be accused of having sympathy for the fascist regime.[47] On the whole, 'the idea that planning could represent a useful corrective to, if not an integral replacement for, the market, which had presented such a sorry picture of itself with the Great Depression, was shared by numerous progressive U.S. and European economists'.[48]

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42 Ragionieri 1976, pp. 2211 ff.

43 Santomassimo 2006, p. 106; see in this regard the statements by Ugo Spirito, ibid., pp. 153 ff.

44 Cf. ibid., p. 198 ff.

45 Rafalski 1991, p. 86.

46 Ibid., pp. 93 ff.

47 See in this regard the evidence gathered by Settembrini 2001, in particular p. 376, which, for example, cites the view of the American Edward Corsi in 1928, according to which the 'corporations, which actually regulate salaries, work hours and work conditions, will in the end control production, just as the Soviets control production in Russia. In other words, the fascist plan is for a syndicalist state supported by a strong national government in which capital, if it survives, will play the role of collaborator'. Similarly, in 1929 Tasca defined corporativism as 'the most vital, most revolutionary part of fascism' (ibid., p. 419). See also, in the oft-cited book by Santomassimo 2006, the positive views by Italian and foreign intellectuals, such as Sombart, De Man, Cantimori, Einaudi, and so on.

48 Flores 1990, p. 70.

All this only confirmed Gramsci in his conviction that the principle of state intervention to regulate the economy was not only a necessary condition (even if not sufficient in itself, as will be shown below) for the birth and development of the first socialist state in history, but also a necessary feature of 'modernity' itself.[49] In fact, the contemporaneous development of the world economy, in particular after the 1929 crisis, appeared for the moment to corroborate Gramci: for example, as he himself stated regarding *Nationalisations and State Takeovers* (the title of Notebook 7, § 40, based on a source from July 1931), at that time 'the scope of the operations of public enterprises [was] much more extensive than is generally believed, and this is especially true of certain branches. In Germany, the capital of public enterprises amount[ed] to one-fifth of the total national wealth'. During those same years, on the eve of the war and more generally in the 1930s, fascist Italy was on its way to becoming, after the Soviet Union, the country with the largest state industrial sector (for example, I.R.I); 'interventionist' tendencies by the state in the economy were occurring everywhere, starting in the U.S. with the Keynesianism in Roosevelt's New Deal, which in turn was likened, in truth more by critics than by admirers, to the Soviet experiment.[50]

However, all this should not cause one to overlook the idea, expressed by Gramsci in § 40 of Notebook 7, 'that public enterprises are [not] a form of socialism, … they are an integral part of capitalism', or at least of certain phases of its development, even if, as Lenin held, 'state-monopoly capitalism is a complete *material* preparation for socialism, the *threshold* of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism *there are no intermediate rungs*'.[51]

4 Towards a New Reformation?

As a result of all this, in the first part of the prison reflections, at a moment when Gramsci gradually distanced himself from the theory (Bukharin's) and

49 Statements to this effect can be found in numerous notes in the *Notebooks*, starting with Notebook 2, § 137 (end of 1930 to the start of 1931), where one can find that the transition to more modern forms of agriculture 'can only take place in a highly developed economy that follows a plan'.

50 See Santomassimo 2006, p. 118. Also to be kept in mind is that, 'during the "interventionist" years in the economy and those of the founding of the IMI and IRI, any form whatsoever of state intervention in the economy was considered "corporative" in the public debate in fascist Italy' (ibid., p. 189). On the comparison with the New Deal, see ibid., pp. 207 ff.

51 Lenin 1964a, p. 364.

the political practice of Soviet Marxism (Stalinism), the view of planning is aimed mainly (if not exclusively) at emphasising the positive aspects. Without the availability of any notes in which the question is explicitly dealt with, it is possible to look for traces of the evolution of this view in several notes on an apparently unrelated topic: the opposition between the Protestant Reformation and the Renaissance.[52] Gramsci himself suggests this possible investigative leitmotif in Notebook 7, § 44 (November 1931), when he states:

> *Reformation and Renaissance*. To show that the process of the molecular formation of a new civilization currently under way may be compared to the Reformation movement, one could analyze, among other things, selected aspects of the two phenomena. The historico-cultural node that needs to be sorted out in the study of the Reformation is the transformation of the concept of grace from something that should 'logically' result in the greatest fatalism and passivity into a real practice of enterprise and initiative on a world scale that was [instead] its dialectical consequence and that shaped the ideology of nascent capitalism. But now we are seeing the same thing happening with the concept of historical materialism. For many critics, its only 'logical' outcome is fatalism and passivity; in reality, however, it gives rise to a blossoming of intitiatives and enterprises that astonish many observers (cf. the *Economist* supplement by Michael Farbman). If one were to produce a study of the [Soviet] Union, the first chapter or even the first section of the book should really develop the material collected under the rubric of 'Reformation and Renaissance'.

Behind this parallel, set forth for the first time in this note,[53] are two ideas that were initially distinct in Gramsci's thought: on the one hand, the observation of the effect of a strong stimulus on activity, especially economic, by the reformist

52 As it is impossible here to deal fully with the question beyond its relationship to the specific problem at hand, for any further reference see Frosini, 'Riforma e Rinascimento', in Frosini and Liguori (eds.) 2004, pp. 170 ff., and the bibliography therein provided, as well as Frosini 2010, pp. 241 ff., which contain considerations that coincide in large part with those presented below.

53 Here, too, one can speak of a return to the ideas of his younger days. See, for example, what Gramsci wrote on 12 January 1918, in an article significantly entitled *Critical Criticism*: 'Long before Marx, Giovanni Battista Vico said that belief in divine providence had been a positive force in history, as it had proved a stimulus for conscious action. If even a belief in divine providence can act in this way, then a belief in "determinism" could have the same effect, for Lenin in Russia, and for others elsewhere' (now in PPW, 43–6).

movement, first and foremost Calvinism; on the other, the thesis that historical materialism can and must represent 'the new intellectual and moral Reformation'.[54] Only later would he conclude that Marxism could also be compared to the Protestant Reformation because of the connection, only apparently paradoxical, that exists in both doctrines between determinism and activism.

Gramsci first wrote 'as regards the doctrine of grace and its tranformation into a motive for industrial energy' in § 51 of Notebook 1 (February to March 1930),[55] referring to a book by 'Kurt Kaser, *Reformation and Counter-Reformation*, on the doctrine of grace in Calvinism' and one by André Philip, *Le problème ouvrier aux États-Unis*, 'which cites topical documents about this transformation', both published in 1927.[56] Moreover, the words themselves introducing the topic – *as regards* – bring to mind an idea already in Gramsci's mind, perhaps going back to 1918,[57] that may have been influenced by other readings not explicitly mentioned in the *Notebooks*, for example, the *Sommario di storia della filosofia* by De Ruggiero, which Gramsci asked for in a letter to Tatiana dated 17 December 1928,[58] and which he received by February of the following year,[59] in which he stated: 'and yet from this harsh slavery of grace sprang forth the energy and ardor of those who felt they were the chosen few … the thriving Calvinist communities, rich in strong moral and religious personalities, accustomed to governing themselves, and which gave Europe and

54 Cf. in this regard Rolfini 1990, pp. 127–49.

55 One cannot over-emphasise the importance of these two months of highly intense work on the *Notebooks*, during which the bases were laid for all of Gramsci's subsequent reflections.

56 Cf. in this regard V. Gerratana, *Q*, 2494–6; in the first part of the note Gramsci cited another text that could represent an additional possible source on the topic: A.C. Jemolo, *Il giansenismo in Italia prima della rivoluzione*, Bari, Laterza, 1928.

57 Initial reflections in this sense can perhaps be found in the article entitled *Spirito associativo* (February 14, 1918) in which Gramsci observed that 'the statement that in Italy the associative spirit, the spirit of solidarity, is missing has been repeated *ad nauseam*. This deficiency in the habits and character of Italians goes back to the Catholic tradition, which stifles individuality, while Protestantism, with its free examination of the Scriptures, develops it, gathers it together, brings out solidarity and resistence' (now in Gramsci 1982, p. 660).

58 Cf. LP I, 237–9.

59 In fact, this book is held by the Fondo Gramsci, and is among those he possessed in prison. As it is signed by the prison warden G. Parmegiani, who died in March 1929, it could only have been given him before the preceding month (cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 2366 and 3129); in fact, in a letter dated 25 March Gramsci himself recommended it as 'a good manual of the history of philosophy' (cf. LP I, 256–9).

America the first models of a democratic government'.[60] Such considerations excluded, at least up until that moment, any direct influence on Gramsci by the *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* which, published in German in 1922 and in the Italian translation in 1925, would only be read by him in the serial publication in the journal *Nuovi studi di diritto, economia e politica* between May–August 1931 and June–October 1932.[61]

A little further on, in Notebook 4, § 3 (May 1930), Gramsci himself suggested another possible source in this regard: a page from Croce's *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* which states

> Calvinism, with its harsh conception of Grace and its austere discipline, did not encourage free inquiry and the cult of beauty either; instead, through its interpretation, development, and adaptation of the concepts of Grace and vocation, it ended up promoting energetically economic life, production, and the accumulation of wealth.

This section is interesting in that it presents for the first time an outline of the last five centuries of European history – 'Renaissance-Reformation – German philosophy – French Revolution – secularism [liberalism] – historicism – modern philosophy – historical materialism' – whose themes would subsequently be significantly developed. One such topic, in fact, was the 'Reanissance-Reformation' link and the opposition of these two historiographical categories, of which only the latter would be further developed; that is, the analogy between the two extreme moments, initial and final, *Reformation* and *historical materialism*. Nevertheless, for the moment this parallel had not yet appeared in the *Notebooks*, though one could be found between the Marxist *vulgate* and popular Catholicism, which was destined to disappear, replaced by the former. In fact, Gramsci held that '"politically", materialism is close to the people, to popular beliefs, prejudices and even superstitions'; he also stated in § 3:

60 De Ruggiero 1928, pp. 221 ff.

61 Indirect proof of this is the fact that Notebook 7, § 37 (February–November 1931) mentions a maxim by Goethe that differs from the version in the above-cited work by Weber (cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 2761). There are references to other writings by Weber even in Notebook 2, § 75 and Notebook 3, § 119 (dating to February 1929 and August–September 1930, respectively); however, in both cases this is probably indirect information (cf. *Q*, 2559 and 2614); it is a different matter with Notebook 12, § 1 (SPN, 5–33) and Notebook 15, § 48, which, however, date back to 1932 and 1933, respectively. For an overall assessment of the relation between Gramsci and Weber regarding the 'modern', see Montanari 1989, pp. 133–60; Cavalli 1993, pp. 69–85.

> popular religion is crassly materialistic, and the official religion tries not to distance itself too much, lest it cut itself off from the masses and become the ideology of restricted groups. Modern neo-Scholastics are, in fact, attempting to incorporate positivism into Catholicism … Something similar occurs in the case of Marxism as well,

in particular in its materialistic 'deviation' from which Gramsci had not definitively distanced himself, recognising it still had at least somewhat of a utilitarian role. Nevertheless, for the moment such views were isolated and unapplied,[62] and no more would be said about the determinism-activism relation for more than a year, until the end of 1931.

In the meantime Gramsci developed the other of the two leitmotifs mentioned above: the connection between 'Reformation' (Protestant) and 'new Reformation' (historical materialism and Soviet 'experiment'), starting from the link mentioned earlier in Notebook 3, § 40 (June–July 1930) between *Reformation and Renaissance*, which would generate one of the most ample 'rubrics' in the *Notebooks*:

> The scattered observations on the differing historical significances of the Protestant Reformation and the Italian Renaissance, of the French Revolution and the Risorgimento (the Reformation is to the Renaissance as the French Revolution is to the Risorgimento)[63] can be collected in a single essay, possibly even under the title 'Reformation and Renaissance'.

In Notebook 4, § 75 (November 1930) Gramsci once again laments the lack in Italy of 'an intellectual and moral reform involving the popular masses', unlike what had occurred with the 'Lutheran Reformation – English Calvinism – in France, eighteenth-century rationalism and concrete political thought', doctrines that produced 'action by the masses', while 'modern idealism, in its Crocean form … has not touched significant masses of people'. He concluded that 'therefore historical materialism will have or may have this func-

62 Notebook 1, § 51 was not rewritten, while Notebook 4, § 3 would be taken up again, probably in 1932, in Notebook 16, § 9 (SPN, 388–99).

63 The reference here might be above all to Notebook 4, § 3, whose evolution undoubtedly represents a more detailed development due to its emphasising several stages of these historical events as positive and progressive (Reformation and French Revolution), as opposed to others not equally considered (the Renaissance and Risorgimento: not coincidentally two Italian moments, representing both the causes and manifestations of the age-old backwardness in this country compared to the rest of Europe).

tion',[64] restated in the contemporaneous Notebook 7, § 1, where he spoke explicitly of 'the new intellectual and moral Reformation represented by historical materialism'.

Over the subsequent months there was a true 'explosion' in the *Reformation and Renaissance* rubric as well as in numerous notes in Notebooks 5, 6 and 7:[65] Gramsci himself observed in Notebook 7, § 43 (November 1931), that 'the more I reflect on these models of cultural development, the more they seem to be a comprehensive and important critical point of reference'. These thoughts continue in § 44, where the link between Calvinist and Marxist determinism is explicitly set forth; the same note makes a clear distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism regarding 'their reciprocal positions vis-à-vis grace and "good works"' – which 'in Catholic discourse have little to do with activities and initiatives that entail labor and industriousness'[66] – which is a prelude to the abandonment of the initial analogy between Marxism and Roman Christianity.

Gramsci returned to this question in Notebook 8, § 205 (February–March 1932) where, regarding the 'recent philosophical debates' involving Marxism, he was pleased by the fact 'a mechanistic conception [had] changed into an activist conception – this is, therefore, a polemic against mechanistic thought'; in fact, as observed above, Gramsci's optimism in this regard is rather unjustified. However, what is of interest here is his praise of 'the "deterministic, fatalistic, mechanistic" element': though declaring it 'a mere ideology, an ephemeral superstructure from the very beginning' (in fact, in his view already surpassed), he defined it as historically 'justified' and 'necessary' due to

> the 'subaltern' character of certain social groups … a formidable force of moral resistance, of cohesion, of patient perseverance …, an 'act of faith' in the rationality of history transmuted into an impassioned teleology that is a substitute for the 'predestination', 'providence', etc., of religion.

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64 This note, like the preceding one, anticipating the future link between determinism and activism, remained in single draft, as often occurred with many other notes that, in differing contexts, played a similar role as a 'laboratory' for subsequent formulations.

65 Cf. Notebooks 5, §§ 53, 91, 123 and 160; 6, §§ 116, 118; 7, §§ 43–4 and 68, as well as the many other contemporaneous notes on questions concerned with fifteenth and sixteenth-century history.

66 The 'contrast [between] the Protestants' [activist] conception of grace that gave rise to the spirit of enterprise and provided it with its moral form [and] the passive and *Lazarus*-like conception of grace [typical] of the Catholic populace' would be taken up again in Notebook 8, § 230 (April 1932).

Up until this point the Protestant doctrine of divine predestination and Marxist deterministic 'deviation' is reproposed in the same terms in Notebook 7, § 44 (November 1931); nevertheless, limiting the dynamic role of the latter to a historical phase that had already concluded began to weaken the analogy, causing Gramsci to reject it in short order. In fact, 'when the subaltern becomes leader and is in charge, the mechanistic conception will sooner or later represent an imminent danger, and there will be a revision of a whole mode of thinking because the mode of existence will have changed'; indeed, as he stated at the end of the note, sharply varying his opinion, 'the ineptitude and futility of mechanical determinism, of passive and smug fatalism must be exposed at all times, without waiting for the subaltern to become leader and take charge'. This wavering went on for some time, since in Notebook 8, § 231 (April 1932) De Ruggiero's observation of the 'paradox of a "narrowly and barrenly materialistic ideology"' such as Marxism, 'that in practice gives rise to a passion for ideals, to an ardor for renewal', was commented on with the statement: 'yet, truly, there is nothing paradoxical and providential' in an event that certainly 'is not new in history … One possible example is the Protestant theory of predestination and grace and how it gave rise to a vast expansion of the spirit of initiative', with explicit reference at last to 'M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* … as a representation of the phenomenon mentioned by De Ruggiero'.[67]

Notebook 10, II, § 28 (June 1932; SPN, 369–70) also reproposed the relation between determinism and activism, which was not present in the corresponding A text (Notebook 8, § 210, from February–March): '… out of Calvinist predestination there arose one of the greatest impulses to practical initiative the world has ever known. Similarly, every other form of determinism has at a certain point developed into a spirit of initiative and into an extreme tension of collective will'. However, what might have appeared as an unexpected step backward with respect to the overall development of the *Notebooks* did not have a follow-up.[68] The rejection of the propulsive force of mechanistic determinism was, in

67 In the second draft of Notebook 10, II, § 31.I (FS, 383–9) Gramsci would add a further confirmation of the imminent abandonment of the parallel between Calvinism and Marxism: 'this verbiage of De Ruggiero's is either vain or to be traced back to one of Croce's propositions that every philosophy, as such, is nothing other than idealism; but having stated this thesis, why the great battle of words? Would it be just over a question of terminology?'.

68 Indirect confirmation of this comes from a text written a short time before (Notebook 10, I, § 11, mid-April to mid-May; FS, 354–6), where the hope that 'an adequate renewal of the philosophy of praxis' might lead to the creation of 'a new integral culture, having the mass characteristics of the Protestant Reformation and the French Enlighten-

fact, confirmed shortly thereafter (between June and August 1932) in Notebook 10, II, § 36 (FS, 430–3), in which Gramsci complains that, as a result of such false beliefs 'a "myth" has been created of many affirmations of critical economy, and one cannot say that such myth formation has not had its immediate practical importance and might not still have one'; nevertheless,

> it is probable that at that level the political method of arbitrarily forcing a scientific thesis in order to draw from it a vigorous and propulsive popular myth is, in the last analysis, demonstrated to be inept and productive of greater damage than use. The method might be compared to the use of narcotics, which create an instant of euphoria as regards physical and psychic forces but which weaken the organism permanently.

At the same time (together with several other notes) Gramsci took up the arguments from Notebook 8, § 205 in Notebook 11, § 12 (SPN 323–43), affirming the above-mentioned definitive death sentence for 'the mechanistic conception', characterised now 'like religon or drugs (in their stupefying effect)', leading him to posit 'the need to bury it', though 'with all due honours' and after the well-deserved 'funeral oration':

> Its role could really be compared with that of the theory of predestination and grace for the beginnings of the modern world, a theory which found its culmination in classical German philosophy and in its conception of freedom as the consciousness of necessity. It has been a replacement in the popular consciousness for the cry of 'tis God's will', although even on this primitive, elementary plane it was the beginnings of a more modern and fertile conception than that contained in the expression 'tis God's will' or in the theory of grace. Is it possible that a 'formally' new conception can present itself in a guise other than the crude, unsophisticated version of the populace … The beginnings of a new world, rough and jagged though they always are, are better than the passing away of the world in its death-throes and the swan-song that it produces.

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ment' was followed by the clarification that this 'new culture' must also possess 'the classicism of Greek and Italian Renaissance culture', which presupposes the recomposition of the contrast between Reformation-Renaissance, which, as noted above, represented one of the bases for the parallel between Calvinism and historical materialism from an activist perspective, and thus confirmation, in substance if not yet in form, of its having been superseded.

Even more severe, if that is possible, was Gramsci's view on the dangers inherent in the deterministic conception expressed in Notebook 10, II, § 51 (February 1933), where he denounced the fact that

> a sporting mentality has arisen that has made liberty into a football to play with. 'Each peasant churl who plays the partisan' imagines himself a dictator, and the job of a dictator seems easy: give imperious orders, sign documents, etc., since it is thought that 'thanks to the grace of God' everyone will obey and the verbal and written orders will be carried out: the word will become flesh. If it doesn't, that means it will be necessary to wait further until 'divine grace' (that is, the so-called 'objective conditions') makes it possible.

It is clear to see in this passage a reference to totalitarianism, not only fascist or Nazi (during those months solidifying its rise to power) but Stalinist as well, with its abstractions and crude deterministic language;[69] in any event, it is clear that during the second phase of his prison reflections Gramsci finally abandoned all optimism regarding events under way in the Soviet Union, first and foremost its vaunted resounding success in the economic and social fields.

5 Gramsci as Critic of the 'Critical Economy'

As he continued to reflect on the question Gramsci thus felt the need to critically analyse the economic model (except for the claim of the validity of the principle of the 'regulation' of the economy) as it was applied in the USSR, becoming increasingly dubious as to its validity in the Italian context, for which he supported a more or less lengthy democratic-constitutional transition phase, as also revealed by Piero Sraffa's account of his meeting with Gramsci on 25 March 1937, one month before his death.[70] Nevertheless, the harsh, though indirect, criticisms of Stalinism[71] (which were justified the more one considers that

69 Pons 2008, p. 427, points out that 'from 1933 onwards Gramsci reflected much more on the similarities rather than the differences between the totalitarian regimes'.

70 Cf. Spriano 1958, pp. 154–7.

71 An extensive literature exists on the topic, the result of a wide-ranging debate significantly at the same time as the breakup of the Soviet empire, starting with Vacca 1988, pp. 129–46, which underscored the anti-Stalinist character even back then of the entire structure of Gramsci's thought. Of an entirely differing opinion is De Domenico, who explicitly criticised Vacca, claiming that Gramsci, 'in his both Aesopic and astutely abstract language

throughout Europe, and not only among communists or their sympathisers, 'the prevailing climate during the first five-year plan succeeded in putting the increasingly authoritarian and police-like features of Stalin's regime in a new light or removing them')[72] did not, in fact, lead him to totally reject the Bolshevik revolutionary experience nor the prospects for possibly moving beyond the capitalist horizon.

Once established that 'one must conceive of the state as "educator" insofar as it aims to create a new type or level of civilization' (the regulated society, that is), and that, to this end, the state must carry out the indispensable task of 'razionalization', it follows that it is 'an instrument of acceleration and Taylorization' precisely in that 'it operates according to a plan, pushing, encouraging, stimulating, etc.' and 'that the state essentially operates on economic forces, reorganizes and develops the apparatus of economic production, and innovates the structure' (even if from this 'it does not follow that the elements of the superstructure are left alone to develop spontaneously through some kind of aleatory and sporadic germination').[73] It has already been observed that Gramsci was faced with the 'poverty of the centralized planning model adopted in the USSR and [the] weakness of its theoretical underpinnings: the reproduction schema from the second volume of *Capital*. There is a very prominent note in this regard that should be mentioned', in which Gramsci 'notes that the theory of value cannot represent the basis of economic policy in a planned economy'.[74]

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in the *Notebooks*', would have judged 'Stalin's repressive action against the right-wing saboteurs and deviationists … legitimate and necessary' (De Domenico 1991, p. 28, note 71). Moreover, Stalin would have achieved 'the most authentic spirit of Lenin's concept of "hegemony"' (ibid., p. 30). In fact, according to De Domenico, based on Gramsci's words 'the greatest modern theorist of the philosophy of praxis' would become Stalin and not Lenin, 'as until now has been maintained' (p. 21 and note 55). A somewhat intermediate position was taken by Grigor'eva 1991, pp. 29–41, who found 'debatable certain conclusions' of Vacca's, though recognising the need to 'analyze more deeply the topic of Gramsci's sources of information' in this regard (pp. 30 ff.). On the subsequent developments in this debate, which led to the recognition by the sharpest critics of the implicitly yet manifestly critical character of Gramsci with regard to Stalin's USSR and to further inquiries into his possible sources of knowledge on this issue, see the above-cited Benvenuti and Pons 1999, in addition to the online *Gramsci Bibliography*.

72 Flores 1990, p. 78. It is enough to cite the words of the U.S. writer Lincoln Steffens: 'I have seen the future and it works' (ibid., p. 30); the times were still far off when the (ex-)sympathising intellectuals would repudiate *The God that failed*.

73 Notebook 8, § 62 (February–March 1932), transcribed almost literally in Notebook 13, § 11 (SPN, 246–7).

74 Vacca 1988, p. 134; the reference is to Notebook 10, II, § 23 (FS, 168–70), which will be examined shortly below.

In fact, while Notebook 7, §18 (between the end of 1930 and February 1931) starts from a recognition that 'in [Marxist] economics, the center of unity is value' and, as he writes in the contemporary §22, from the view that the so-called

> *theory of comparative* [*and declining*] *costs* … which, together with the other theory of static and dynamic equilibrium, occupies such an important place in modern official economics – is … perfectly compatible with [or the equivalent in different language of] the Marxist theory of value [and of the fall of the rate of profit]; in other words, it is its scientific equivalent in 'pure' and official language [stripped of all political force for subaltern productive classes],

he subsequently realises that

> for critical economics, the interesting problem begins once 'socially necessary labour' has already been established in a mathematical formula; for classical economics,[75] on the other hand, the whole interest lies in the dynamic phase of the formation of 'socially necessary labour' at the local, national and international levels, and in the problems posed by the differences in the divisions of the work processes in the various stages of this labour process. It is the comparative cost, i.e. the comparison of the 'particular' labour embodied in the various goods, that is of interest to classical economics. But is not this research also of interest to critical economics? And is it 'scientific', in a work like the *Précis*,[76] not to deal with

75 'Generally, in the *Notebooks* Gramsci uses the term "classical economics" in a broad sense to include all pre-Marxist and post-Marxist economic theories, as opposed to Marxist economics defined as "critical economics"' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2875). However, it should be noted that 'the main feature distinguishing in general the categories of "classical economics" from those of "pure" economics … is the same difference that distinguishes and opposes "pure" economics and "critical" economics, and that creates at the same time … a continuity between (classical) political economics and the critique of political economics … Thus, there is an extent to which some of the theories of "classical" economics (already fundamentally examined by "critical" economics) must be further analyzed, and some of those of "pure" economics replaced' (Calabi 1988, p. 167; see also Potier 1987, p. 116). Taking this into account, one can perhaps better understand what Gramsci means when he states in Notebook 10, II, §9, that 'the philosophy of praxis equals Hegel plus David Ricardo'.

76 This is the volume by Lapidus and Ostrovitianov entitled *Précis d'économie politique*, translated from Russian by Victor Serge, and held by the Fondo Gramsci – see Lapidus

> these nexuses of problems, too? Critical economics passes through different historical stages and it is natural in each one of them for the emphasis to be placed on what the historically prevalent theoretical and practical nexus is at a particular time. When it is property that is in command of the economy, emphasis is placed on the 'ensemble' of socially necessary labour, as a scientific and mathematical synthesis, since in practice one wants labour to become aware of itself as a whole, of the fact that it is first and foremost an 'ensemble' and that as an 'ensemble' it determines the fundamental process of economic motion … When it is labour itself, however, that has taken command of the economy, it too, because of the fundamental change in its position, will have to worry about questions of specific utilities and comparisons between them in order to draw from them initiatives as regards movement forwards. What after all are the 'competitions', if not one particular way of becoming involved in this nexus of problems and of understanding that forward progress comes about through individual 'thrusts'; that is to say, by 'comparing' costs and insisting on continuously reducing them through singling out and even bringing about the objective and subjective conditions in which such becomes possible.

This long passage from Notebook 10, II, § 23 (June 1932; FS, 168–70) contains many reflective ideas (even though expressed 'cryptically') that in themselves would be sufficient to confute the view of a disinterest, or worse, a lack of understanding on the part of Gramsci for economic topics. It is important to describe more fully the main ideas in this regard.

The first historical attempt at transforming into doctrine and governing practice what was always and only a 'critique of political economy' was the rejection of the Soviet experience focused on the accusation against its entire leadership – and thus first and foremost Stalin – of not having correctly interpreted Marx's doctrines, in particular *Capital*,[77] but of having deterministically and mechanically applied them to the letter. This occurred through the elimination of one of his 'canonical' texts (in this case the *Précis*, and more often Bukharin's *Popular Manual*); in Notebook 10, II, § 37.11 (June–August 1932; FS, 176–9) Gramsci reflects on

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and Ostrovitianov 1929. It does not contain any prison marks and thus certainly was read and studied by Gramsci before his imprisonment (the original Russian edition was published in 1926).

77 For a more extensive treatment of Gramsci's interpretation of *Capital* as found in his pre-prison writings, see Cospito 2011, pp. 93–103.

> how, in present-day terms, could and should one write an outline of critical economic science … the method of exposition adopted ought not to be determined by given literary sources, but originate from and be dictated by the critical and cultural requirements of current interest to which one wants to provide a scientific and organic solution; … unimaginative and slavish summaries are on this account to be avoided, the whole material, instead, being of necessity recast and reorganised in an 'original' and preferably systematic fashion … From this standpoint, Lapidus and Ostrovityanov's manual is 'dogmatic', puts forward its claims and develops its themes as if no one radically 'challenged' and rejected them, rather as if they were the expression of a science which, from the period of struggle and polemics, [is] to become established and triumph. Obviously, however, this is not the case.

Subsequently, in the *Notes on economics* in Notebook 15, § 43 (FS, 174–5), he observes that

> one may draw attention to what careful studies modern economists devote to their science in order continually to perfect the logical instuments of their science … The same tendency is not present in critical economy, which all too often makes use of stereotyped expressions and expresses itself in superior tones that are not warranted by the exposition: it gives the impression of tiresome arrogance and nothing else. For this reason, it seems useful to stress this aspect of economic literature.

To this he opposes

> the examples of the prefaces to the first volume of *Critical Economy* [*Capital*] and to the volume *The Critique of Political Economy*: they are all perhaps too short and bald, but this principle is adhered to, and elsewhere in the body of the text there are numerous references to method and philosophy.

He writes a few pages later, in § 45 (FS, 176):

> What strikes one is how a critical standpoint that requires the greatest intelligence, openmindedness, mental freshness and scientific inventiveness has become the monopoly of narrow-minded, jabbering wretches who, only by reason of the dogmatism of their position, manage to maintain a place not in science itself but in the marginal bibliography of sci-

> ence. *In these matters the greatest danger is represented by an ossified form of thought: better a certain disorderly refractoriness than the philistine defence of preconceived cultural positions*.[78]

Some have maintained that these criticisms of Gramsci's were not against the Stalinist Soviet leadership but Bukharin and the other opponents of Stalin – at that time (the last two notes date back to May 1933), moreover, already politically, if not yet physically, 'liquidated' – and for this reason they were aimed at a text 'already no longer valid … which he knew had already been superceded'.[79] What was said about Bukharin's *Manual* can also be said about *Précis*: apart from the personal issues between the two authors, the two texts appeared to Gramsci emblematic of the involution, cultural even more so than political and social, underway in the Soviet Union, as well as fully confirming his view in Notebook 3, § 42 that between 'a fatalistic and mechanistic conception of history' and 'crude, superficial, and formalistic voluntarist positions', there is only '*apparent contradictions*'. In fact, in a schematic and thus necessarily dogmatic Marxist analysis of the fundamental categories of classical economics (value, surplus value, salary, profit, capital, rent, etc.), Lapidus and Ostrovitianov juxtapose and counterpose the presumed results of the 'communist economy', presenting this not only as a radical alternative to the former but as having been fully achieved or on the way to being so.

6 Toward 'a New Economic Science'

After the above examination of Gramsci's criticism of Soviet economic theory and practice, this section will investigate the presence in the *Notebooks* of a *pars costruens* regarding the means and instruments for constructing and managing the future 'regulated society'. The ideal starting point for Gramsci's non-systematic reflections on this question is his statement that 'the whole conception of critical economy is historicist' (Notebook 10, II, § 37.II; FS, 176–9). Nor could it be otherwise, since Marxism is nothing if not 'absolute historicism … in the sense it places in the historical context itself along with the value motivations it starts from, unlike Croce's historicism, which transcends his value motivation'.[80] In fact, Gramsci wrote that 'as a philosophy, historical

78 The added italics emphasise a passage that is evidently autobiographical in tone.

79 Di Domenico 1991, p. 29, note 72.

80 Badaloni 1967, p. 97 and note 2.

materialism asserts theoretically that every "truth" thought to be eternal and absolute has practical origins and has represented or represents a provisional value' (Notebook 4, § 40). In particular, Notebook 4, § 45 (recast together with the previous notes in Notebook 11, § 62 entitled *Historicity of the Philosophy of Praxis*; SPN 404–7),[81] states that 'all hitherto-existing philosophy has been the product and the expression of the inner contradictions of society … But even historical materialism is an expression of historical contradictions; indeed, it is the perfect, complete expression of such contradictions'. Therefore,

> if it is demonstrated that contradictions will disappear, then it is implicitly demonstrated that historical materialism, too, will disappear and that the realm of necessity will give way to the realm of freedom, that is, to a period in which 'thought' or ideas are no longer born on the terrain of contradictions.

With regard to possible future developments, it can be hypothesised (even though it is not possible to make predictions in this regard) that, just as in philosophy 'absolute idealism, or at least certain aspects of it' that are 'a philosophical utopia in the realm of necessity … could become "truth" after the transition from one realm to the other', while the opposite could happen to Marxism (again in Notebook 4, § 40), the same could occur in economics due to several aspects of 'classical' theory; in fact, it is already possible to 'translate them'[82] – even though incompletely and imperfectly ('but what language

81 However, all this, if 'logically' true, is not so in terms of common sense; 'otherwise, men would not act, they would not create new history; in other words, philosophies could not become "ideologies", they could not, in practice, acquire the fanatical granite solidity of "popular beliefs" which have the equivalence of "material forces"'. Cf. Notebook 8, § 174 (November 1931), in which Gramsci reaffirms that 'to think of an affirmation as true in a particular historical period … but "false" in a subsequent period is a very difficult thing to do without falling into skepticism and relativism (moral and ideological opportunism)' (the C text of Notebook 11, § 14 – SPN, 436–7 – would speak of 'an ardous and difficult mental operation'); and in Notebook 10, II, § 40 (June–August 1932; SPN, 368) he states: 'If reality is as we know it and if our knowledge changes continually – if, that is, no philosophy is definitive but all are historically determined – it is hard to imagine that reality changes objectively with changes in ourselves. Not only common sense but scientific thought as well make this difficult to accept'. The problem linked to relativism and skepticism in the moral field is instead taken up in Notebook 8, § 156, transcribed together with other notes in Notebook 16, § 12.

82 For a systematic treatment of the question of Gramsci's thinking on *Translation and Translatability*, see the Boothman 2004, pp. 55–80.

is exactly translatable into another? What single world is exactly translatable into another language?')[83] – into the language of 'critical' economics. In Notebook 10, II, § 20 (FS, 182–4) Gramsci would write that one must

> bear in mind what Engels said about the possibility, even if one starts from the marginalist conception of value, of reaching the same conclusions (even though in a vulgar form) as those arrived at by critical economics. An analysis should be made of all the consequences of Engels's statement. One of them seems to me to be that if one wishes systematically to insist on the fact that orthodox economics does not deal with the same problems, albeit in another language, demonstrating this identity of the problems being treated and demonstrating that the critical solution is the superior one. In short, the test must be 'bilingual' – the authentic text and its vulgar or liberal economics translation as the parallel or interlinear text.[84]

On the other hand, a true 'alternative' to 'classical economics' could not arise until the general conditions for this had been radically changed, as Gramsci wrote in Notebook 11, § 52 (written between August and December 1932; SPN, 410–14):

> Given these conditions in which classical economics was born, in order to be able to talk about a new science or a new conception of economic science (which is the same thing), it would be necessary to have demonstrated that new relations of forces, new conditions, new premises, have been establishing themselves, in other words that a new market has been 'determined' with a new 'automatism' and phenomenism of its own, which presents itself as something 'objective', comparable to the automatism of natural phenomena. Classical economics has given rise to a

83 Notebook 11, § 48; FS, 307–9.

84 Nevertheless, according to Gramsci the capitalists were more aware of this than the proletariat: 'it would be interesting to know whether in their heart of hearts the more intelligent industrialists are not convinced that the "Critical Economy" [*Capital*] contained very good insights into their affairs, and whether they do not take advantage of the lessons thus acquired. This would not be in any way surprising, for if [Marx] has analysed reality exactly then he has done nothing other than systematise rationally and coherently what the historical agents of this reality felt and still feel in a confused and instinctive way, and of which they have a clearer consciousness as a result of the hostile critique' (Notebook 16, § 9; SPN, 388–99).

> 'critique of political economy'[85] but it does not seem to me that a new science or a new conception of the scientific problem has yet been possible. The 'critique' of political economy starts from the concept of the historical character of the 'determined market'[86] and of its 'automatism', whereas pure economics conceives of these elements as 'eternal' and 'natural'; the critique … puts forward the 'transitory' and 'replaceable' nature of the science being criticised … and it puts forward the 'inheritor', the heir presumptive who must yet give manifest proof of his vitality.

However, all of this would occur in the not-too-distant future; in fact, beginning in 1931 Gramsci showed he was aware of the fact that 'Marx initiates intellectually a historical era that will probably last for centuries, that is, until the demise of political society and the advent of regulated society. Only then will his conception of the world be superseded (the conception of necessity ⟨superseded⟩ by the conception of liberty)'.[87] Two years later, in Notebook 14, § 65 (February 1933; SPN, 240–1), he would clarify that

> Before the conditions can be created for an economy that follows a world plan, it is necessary to pass through multiple phases in which the regional

85 The A text (Notebook 8, § 128, from April 1932) speaks of 'economic science' and the '"critique of an economic science"', respectively, emphasising more the fact that in the economic field Marxism had until then only produced the *pars destruens*, or the 'critique of political economy': not coincidentally this is the formula Gramsci used to allude to *Capital*. As with other similar expression of his, for example, the 'philosophy of praxis' instead of *historical materialism*, this was not a simple expedient to get around prison censorship but a critical reinterpretation of the formulae of Marxist tradition, above all the extensive use of epigons.

86 As is well-known, Gramsci attributed to Ricardo the origin of this concept, even if 'it is difficult to find verbatim in his work', while it is found in that of the '"orthodox" economists such as Jannaccone or Ricci' (Maccabelli 1998, p. 94).

87 Notebook 7, § 33. The image comes from the famous essay by Engels entitled *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, which was well known to and frequently cited by Gramsci. One should note the analogy with the views of Lenin, who, in addition to citing this essay on several occasions in his writings, observed in 1920 that 'we in Russia (in the third year since the overthrow of the bourgeoisie) are making the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism or the lower stage of communism' (Lenin 1966, p. 34). Moreover, starting with the 1926 Letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Gramsci had emphasised the fact that in Russia 'the proletariat, once power has been taken, *can construct socialism*' (now in SPW II, 437–40), to indicate that this was a long-term process whose outcome was anything but certain.

> combinations (of groups of nations) may be of various kinds. Furthermore, it must never be forgotten that historical development follows the laws of necessity until the initiative has decisively passed over to those forces which tend towards construction in accordance with a plan of peaceful and solidary division of labour.

During this long interval of time several aspects of 'classical economics', starting with its focus on the market and individual profit, could be useful ('translated' from the 'critical' point of view) in the country where this process, even with the inevitable contradictions involved, had begun, without forgetting that

> it is not enough to use the sole criterion of economic utility for examining the passage from one form of economic organisation to another; one must also consider the political criterion, viz. whether the passage was objectively necessary and corresponded to a certain general interest, even if this were a long term one.[88]

This idea is quite closely inspired by the Leninist N.E.P., from which, for example, derives the emphasis on the positive role of 'competition' among workers contained in the long note in Notebook 10, II, § 23 (FS, 168–70) quoted above, interpreted as 'socialist emulation'.[89] However, what is more important is that it shows that Gramsci clearly understood what most of the official representatives of the so-called Marxist 'economic science' only came to declare a half century later – and, above all, after the breakup of the Soviet Union: that the contrast between a market economy and a planned economy in the pure abstract sense, as if these were two alternatives for economic calculations, exists (or better yet, existed) exclusively in theory. This was because, as the representatives of the so-called French *regulation* school (Aglietta, Boyer, Mistral, etc.) had come to understand in the 1970s (not coincidentally at the

88 Notebook 19, § 7 (probably during the second half of 1934; FS, 248–53), second draft of Notebook 9, § 110 (August–September 1932), with respect to which there are no substantial changes.

89 See, for example, Lenin 1964b, pp. 386–95; V. Gerratana also concurs that the passage from Notebook 10, II, § 32 which we have referred to contains an 'allusion to the competition of socialist emulation among Soviet workers' (*Q*, 2875). On socialist emulation, destined in the mid-1930s to emerge as the Stakhanovite movement, as a Bolshevik version of Anglo-Saxon competition aimed at improving production both quantitatively and qualitatively, see Codevilla 1986, pp. 317 ff.

time of another great world economic crisis; in fact, even seeing some similarities with the Great Depression of 1929), in part utilising Gramsci's *Notebooks*, the concept of a regulated society assumes a political intervention that is internal, not external, to the economy, and which thus goes beyond the state-market dichotomy. This allowed them to continue to side with Marx in their rejection of the idea of a universal economic rationality independent of any social determination as well as of a formal egalitarianism founded on the idealistic assumption (but also accepted by the marginalists) of an immutable human nature that would require a purely arbitrary state, in fact would see in its intervention (welfare) the origin itself of the crisis. It also allowed them to break from official Marxism by refusing to accept that the author of *Capital* had uncovered once and for all the laws of the functioning of capitalism and its internal contradictions. Regarding the capitalist mode of production, whose obsolescence, at least in a reasonable time period, was not up for debate, interest thus focused on the concept of the 'mode of regulation'.[90]

Going back to Gramsci's views of his era, one must also consider, on the one hand, that absolute planning (that which German economists call *Zwangwirtschaft*, forced economy) is not only inefficient but impossible, and on the other that, as stated in Notebook 8, § 128, '"determinated market"' equates to a '"determinated relation of social forces in a determinated structure of productive apparatus" that is guaranteed by a determinated juridical superstructure'; in other words, by the state in its different organisational forms. An entirely similar discourse could be made for the ideology traditionally opposed to the collectivist one, liberalism, which is not always synonymous with *liberty*, to which it is only connected etymologically,[91] starting from its economic 'translation' as laissez-faire. The latter, as Gramsci notes in Notebook 13, § 18 (SPN, 158–67), repeating observations from text A of Notebook 4, § 38, 'is a form of State "regulation", introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means. It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends, and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts'. In other words, 'by virtue of the fact that every form of property is linked to the state, even from the point of view of the classical economists, the state intervenes at every moment of economic life,

90 On the impossibility of more extensive treatment of this question see Aglietta 1976; Boyer and Mistral 1985 (original edition published in 1978).

91 As recently stated by a great contemporary historian: 'even liberals do not have a monopoly on the definition of liberty' (Skinner 2001, p. 124).

which is a continuous web of transfers of property' (Notebook 6, § 10); in particular, as he points out in Notebook 10, II, § 20 (FS, 182–4), state intervention

> is a preliminary condition for any collective economic activity, an element of the determinate market, if not even the determinate market itself, since it is the very political-juridical expression of the fact by which a given commodity (labour) is, first of all, undervalued, then placed in a condition of competitive inferiority, and finally made to shoulder the cost for the whole of the given system.[92]

In addition to greater consideration for several theses of 'classical economics', which are too often rejected as obsolete by some 'orthodox' Marxists, Gramsci points to two aspects for reforming the model of Soviet planning. The first is the reorganisation of production based on the American experience (or the 'Americanistic': Taylorism and Fordism) – in fact, as recently written, 'the more detailed schema of reproduction in the second volume of *Capital*, on which Soviet planning was based, are in reality much poorer in "planning" elements than Fordist regulation was'[93] – thus reversing the negative comparison between Americanism and Bolshevism.[94] The second is the valorisation of the individual's role, in keeping with Gramsci's faith in 'a rational, not an arbitrary, will, which is realised in so far as it corresponds to objective historical necessities' (Notebook 11, § 59; SPN, 345–6). These are two defining aspects of Lenin's political theory and practice, regarding which Gramsci proceeded with his own translation-interpretation work; but they are not deducible from the Vita-Finzi relation mentioned at the start of this chapter,[95] which a careful reading would reveal to be more a polemical stimulus than a true source of information for Gramsci. Thus, for example, while the Italian diplomat spoke of 'elements of interference in the statistics'[96] that do not allow for an exact assessment of the results from the first five-year plan, Gramsci held that 'in the economy the element of "interference" is the human will, the collective will, differently ori-

92 For a discussion from a contemporary perspective of the 'non-neutrality of capitalism with respect to other economic systems', as Nozick and the other 'anarcho-capitalists' maintain, see the arguments in Fildani 2003, in particular pp. 98 ff.

93 Rossi and Vacca 2007, p. 137.

94 See in this regard Nacci 1989, pp. 117 ff. and 129 ff. Significant here is the analogy with the 'industrialist' Trotsky, who from 1926 maintained: 'we must dress up Bolshevism in Americanism … Americanize our technology' (quoted in Abosch 1977, p. 76).

95 Cf. Caprioglio 1991, p. 68.

96 Vita-Finzi 1932, p. 577.

ented according to the general conditions of the life of men'[97] (which, if on the one hand probably impeding an 'absolute' planning, on the other favour – not harming, as Vita-Finzi seemed to suggest – the principle of the regulation of the economy). In fact, the role of the individual (better yet, organised individuals), in the long 'war of position' between the forces of conservation and those of change, is more 'propulsive' in accelerating, if not creating, the historical movement; this view is presented in Notebook 11, § 25 (SPN, 427–30, with significant changes from the A text in Notebook 7, § 6 (November 1930), and thus preceding the reading of Vita-Finzi's essay):

> if one thinks about it, even the demand for a planned, i.e. guided, economy is destined to break down the statistical law understood in a mechanical sense, that is statistics produced by the fortuitous putting together of an infinity of arbitrary individual acts. Planning of this kind must be based on statistics, but that is not the same thing. Human awareness replaces naturalistic 'spontaneity'.

As regards Americanism and Fordism, the introductory note to Notebook 22 (SPN, 279–80) is entirely dedicated to this topic:

> one could say that [they] derive from an inherent necessity to achieve the organisation of a planned economy, and that the various problems examined here should be the links of the chain marking the passage from the old economic individualism to the planned economy.

Gramsci goes on to say that: undoubtedly 'the fact that a progressive initiative has been set in train by a particular social force is not without fundamental consequences: the "subaltern" forces, which have to be "manipulated" and rationalised to serve new ends, naturally put up a resistance'.[98] Obviously this should

97 Notebook 10, II, § 57 (FS, 189–90), from February, or at the latest February–May, 1933; this passage could even be undertood as a direct answer to the arguments by the columnist for 'La Cultura', whose essay Gramsci could have read in the meantime, since in the contemporary § 52 of Notebook 14 (FS, 97–9) he explicitly cites the subsequent issue of the journal in which the essay appeared: issue IV, October–December 1932. In particular, the inverted commas Gramsci uses for the term *interference* in the note appears to confirm this assumption.

98 It not possible here to deal with this topic, about which see the recent essay by Baratta 2004, pp. 15–34, and the bibliography therein contained; see also Francioni and Frosini, 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 22', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 18, in particular pp. 3–12.

not occur in a society where these forces have already gained power (exercise a 'dictatorship', in fact) and the 'preliminary condition' in its most complete form, and which Americanism requires in order to better develop, has been achieved: 'This condition could be called "a rational demographic composition" and consists in the fact that there do not exist numerous classes with no essential function in the world of production, in other words, classes which are purely parasitic' (§ 2; SPN, 280–7). On the other hand, Taylorist methods cannot be totally and mechanically transferred to a planned economy, since they represent in any event 'the ultimate stage in the process of progressive attempts by industry to overcome the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall' (§ 1; SPN, 279–80);[99] a problem, according to 'critical economy', that will disappear along with this tendency once it has led to the death of the capitalist system.[100]

Regarding the tendency of this law (as that of other economic laws according to Gramsci), and recalling what was stated above about his gradual distancing from the mechanistic determinism prevalent at that time in Marxist-Leninist circles, Soviet (Bukharin) and otherwise, it can be maintained that it was precisely the discovery of this character that freed Marx from the plethora of positivist science paradigms of his era. Notebook 11, § 52 (between August and December 1932, taking from the A text in Notebook 8, § 128; SPN, 410–14), states, with regard to *Regularity and Necessity*:

> How did the founder of the philosophy of praxis arrive at the concept of regularity and necessity in historical development? I do not think that it can be thought of as a derivation from natural science but rather as an elaboration of concepts born on the terrain of political economy, particularly in the form and with the methodology that economic science acquired from David Ricardo.[101]

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99 On the 'tendential' nature of this law, see Notebook 10, II, §§ 36 and 41.VII (FS, 430–3 and 433–5), as well as §§ 33 (FS, 428–30), 38 (FS, 425–6), 41.VI (FS, 426–8) on the fact that this generally holds for all economic laws, which therefore, unlike those of the natural sciences, can be defined in Crocean terms as 'elliptical comparisons'.

100 For a critical treatment of the presumed 'subalternity to the capitalist point of view' of Gramsci's Americanism and a view of his criticisms of Taylorism, see Burgio, '"Valorizzazione della fabbrica" e americanismo', in Burgio and Santucci (eds.) 1999, pp. 168 ff. See also Maccabelli and Guidi 1998, pp. 97–127.

101 In italics the title of the section. Lunghini, 'Introduzione' to Gramsci 1994c, pp. XIII ff. and notes observed the thematic continuity between this note and a letter to Tania just a bit earlier (30 May 1932, now in LP II, 177). It should be noted that during 1931 Gramsci

In the *Points to Reflect on in Economics* from Notebook 10, II, § 57 (February or February–March 1933; FS, 189–90), Gramsci would extend the argument further, writing, in fact, that

> the question [is] whether there exists a science of economics and in what sense. It may be that economic science is a science *sui generis*, unique in point of fact of its kind. What might be done is to look at how many ways the word science is used by the various philosophical currents, and see whether one of these senses may be applied to economic research. It seems to me that economic science denied that it is science and not only in the 'methodological' sense, that is to say not only in the sense that its procedures are scientific and rigorous. It also seems to me that mathematics, among all the various sciences, is perhaps the one most closely comparable to economics. In any case, economics cannot be considered a natural science (whatever way one conceives of nature or the external world – subjectivist or objectivst), and neither can it be considered a 'historical' science in the common meaning of the word, etc. One of the prejudices against which it is perhaps still necessary to fight is that, in order to be a 'science', certain research should be grouped together with other research in one type and that 'type' is 'science'. It can instead happen not only that such a grouping is impossible, but that a research is 'science' in one given historical period and not in another, for another prejudice is that if a research is 'science', it would always have been and will always be science. (That it was not science was because there were no scientists, not that there was no subject of science.) It is expressly for economics that these critical elements must be examined: there was a period in which there could not be a 'science' not only because there were no scientists but also because there did not yet exist those certain 'automatisms', whose study is exactly what gives rise to scientific research; however, regularity or automatism can be of different types of 'sciences'. It must not be thought that since an 'economic life' has always existed, then the possibility of there being an 'economic science' ought always to have existed, in the same way that since the stars have always been in motion the 'possibility' of there being an astronomy has always existed, even though the astronomers were called astrologers, etc.

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had gone back to examine more closely his direct knowledge of Marx the economist, in particular by translating in Notebook 7 his essay *Lohnarbeit und Kapital* (now in Gramsci 2007, pp. 763–94).

The peculiar nature of economic laws had already been highlighted by Lenin, according to whom 'laws capture what is immobile, and thus they are restricted, incomplete, approximative',[102] as well as by Marx, who, regarding the decline in the rate of profit, pointed out that there

> Must be some counteracting influences at work, which cross and annul the effect of the general law, and which give it merely the characteristic of a tendency, for which reason we have referred to the fall of the general rate of profit as a tendency to fall. The following are the most general counterbalancing forces: I. Increasing intensity of exploitation … II. Depression of wages below the value of labour-power … III. Cheapening of elements of constant capital … IV. Relative over-population … V. Foreign trade … VI. The increase of stock capital.[103]

In Gramsci's time, in addition to or superimposed on such 'counteracting influences' were those deriving from the Taylorist and Fordist methods of Americanism, as described in Notebook 10, § 41.VII (FS, 433–5), second draft, which was considerably extended and rewritten compared to Notebook 7, § 34:

> 1) machines continually being introduced [which] are more perfect and refined; 2) metals used [which] are more resistant and last longer; 3) the formation of a new type of worker, in whom a monopoly is created through high wages; 4) the reduction of waste in manufacturing materials; 5) the ever wider utilisation of ever more numerous by-products, i.e. the saving of previously unavoidable waste, which the great size of the enterprises makes possible; 6) the utilisation of waste heat energy, e.g. the heat from blast furnaces which previously was dispersed into the atmosphere is now being sent by pipe to heat living environments etc. … With each one of these innovations, the industrialist passes from a period of increasing costs (i.e. one of a falling rate of profit) to a period of decreasing costs, in so far as he comes to enjoy a monopoly of initiative which can last a (relatively) long time. The monopoly is also long-lasting due to the high wages that these progressive industrialists 'are obliged' to pay if they want a first-rate skilled workforce and if they want to contend with their competitors for those workers who, from the psycho-technical point of view, have the best aptitude for the new forms of work and pro-

102 Lunghini, 'Introduzione', to Gramsci 1994c, p. XVIII.

103 Marx 1998, pp. 230–9.

> duction … The extension of new methods brings about a series of crises, each of which reproposes the same problems of rising costs and whose cycle can be imagined as recurrent until: 1) the extreme limit of resistence of the material being used is reached; 2) the limit is reached in the introduction of new automatic machinery, i.e. the ultimate ratio between men and machines; 3) the saturation limit of world industrialisation is reached, where one has to take account of the rate of increase of population (which, moreover, declines with the spread of industrialism) and of production for the renewal of consumer and capital goods.

In addition to corresponding 'perfectly to the analysis of how the factory system developed given in the first volume of the Critique of Political Economy' (Notebook 9, § 67, July–August 1932; SPN, 201–2), the Taylorist and Fordist industrial methods were, according to Gramsci, not only destined to take hold in Europe ('America, with the implacable preponderance of its economic production, will force or is already forcing Europe to undergo an upheaval of its socioeconomic alignment'),[104] but could even be useful during the (long, as it turned out) transition phase from capitalism to socialism. An example of this was 'the *Ordine Nuovo* group, which upheld its own type of "Americanism" in a form acceptable to the workers' (Notebook 22, § 2; SPN, 280–7),[105] so that 'a careful analysis

104 Notebook 3, § 11 (May 1930).

105 Particular attention should be paid to the fact that Gramsci breaks from his normal practice and places the term *Americanism* in inverted commas, underscoring the strongly unique features of the form he proposed: 'It seems possible to reply that the Ford method is rational, that is, that it should be generalised; but that a long process is needed for this, during which a change must take place in social conditions and in the way of life and the habits of individuals. This, however, cannot take place through coercion alone' (Notebook 22, § 13; SPN, 310–13; note that in the corresponding A text – Notebook 9, § 72, from August–September 1932 – the question about the 'rationality' of Fordism was still left unanswered, similar to what occurred in the passage from the first draft of Notebook 1, § 70 to the second draft of Notebook 22, § 2 (SPN, 280–7), and from Notebook 1, § 135 to Notebook 22, § 6; SPN, 289–94). On the '"theoretical" good fortune Ford and Taylor enjoyed in the USSR', see Flores 1990, pp. 73 ff.; however, it must be kept in mind that the particular 'type of "Americanism"' Gramsci proposed should not be confused with the '"over"-resolute (and therefore not rationalised) will to give supremacy in national life to industry and industrial methods', regarding which Gramsci would criticise Trotsky (Notebook 22, § 11; SPN, 301–6), and thus (though only implicitly) even, if not above all, Stalin. In fact, how is the doctrine criticised here different from the theory, and above all from the practice, of 'forced indutrialization', which precisely in those years was imposed on Russia by the Georgian dictator? (on this topic see, for example, Boffa 1990, pp. 9–

of Italian history before 1922 … must objectively come to the conclusion that it was precisely the workers who brought into being newer and more modern industrial requirements and in their own way upheld these strenuously'.[106]

Once again it is easy to see similarities between these proposals by Gramsci (though fragmentary and provisional) and the Leninist N.E.P. guidelines, which called on the new leadership class, the working class, to make the sacrifices needed to achieve a new society. In short, if Vita-Finzi regards 'the Soviet revolution … as the greatest attempt at the deviation of instincts, at the rationalization of history',[107] in Notebook 22, § 11 (second half of 1934; SPN, 301–6) Gramsci wrote that 'the American phenomenon [is] the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and of man',[108] even if, as written in § 15 (SPN, 316–18),

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166). In fact, these considerations can be generalised and it can be maintained that, even though Gramsci remained faithful until the end in his comments on the Stalinist line (thanks in part to the objective lack of information he had on the errors and horrors of the latter), in reality he was in essence one of its most ardent adversaries. On the relation between Gramsci's view of 'Taylorism' in his youth and the contemporary one advocated by Lenin, see instead Borso 1977, pp. 69 ff. (in particular note 35 on p. 100). Moreover, the Bolshevik leader, who again in 1913 had defined Taylorism as a '"scientific" system to squeeze out sweat', beginning in the following year had 'distinguished the technical aspect (the rationalization of the production process) from the class exploitation aspect on the part of capital', defining it as 'representing important progress in the shifting of capitalism toward communism' (Prezzo 1977, pp. 81–3). Thus, only a few months from gaining power, he already maintained that 'we must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our own ends', since 'like all capitalist progress, [it] is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements' (Lenin 1965, p. 247), and that 'socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science' (Lenin 1966, p. 333).

106 Notebook 22, § 11 (SPN, 301–6, substantially unchanged from the A text in Notebook 1, § 153, which dates to May 1930).

107 Vita-Finzi 1932, p. 580. Note that, in 'a text from 1934 … on the review of a book by Peregrinus entitled *Grandezza e servitù bolsceviche*', the then 'leftist' fascist Delio Cantimori wrote (quoting from the text in question or from some common source) almost identical words: 'the Soviet revolution is, in fact, the greatest attempt at the deviation of instincts, at the rationalization of history, the greatest act of violence so far that humanity can remember' (quoted from Ciliberto 1991, p. 12). On the other hand, similar expressions were an extensive part of the international debate on the USSR in those years; they are collected in Flores 1990, pp. 50, 143, 190 etc.

108 This time the hypothesis (though appealing) of an implicit response to Vita-Finzi con-

> it is not from the social groups 'condemned' by the new order that reconstruction is to be expected, but from those on whom is imposed the burden of creating with their own suffering the material bases of the new order. It is they who 'must' find for themselves an 'original', and not Americanised, system of living, to turn into 'freedom' what today is 'necessity'.

Gramsci cannot, nor does he want to, go further in this direction, on the one hand due to the declaredly provisional nature of all the notes in the *Notebooks*, and on the other due to the already-described

> impossibility of treating certain questions of the philosophy of praxis in so far as they have not yet become *actual* for the course of history in general or that of a given social grouping. To the economico-corporate phase, to the phase of struggle for hegemony in civil society and to the phase of State power there correspond specific intellectual activities which cannot be arbitrarily improvised or anticipated. In the phase of struggle for hegemony it is the science of politics which is developed; in the State phase all the superstructures [and thus even an appropriate economic science] must be developed, if one is not to risk the dissolution of the State.[109]

On the other hand, all this cannot take place before then since the 'critical economy' – and this is 'one of the features characteristic' of its 'superiority … over pure economics[110] and one of the forces that make it most fruitful as regards scientific progress' – having always applied 'the right tempering between the deductive and the inductive methods', constructs its theories

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tained in Gramsci's note is excluded by the fact that the A text in which it is found (and which is not formally different from this note) goes back to the end of 1930 (Notebook 4, §52).

109 Notebook 11, §65 (SPN, 403–4), second draft of Notebook 4, §46, that is, the note on *Philosophy-politics-economics* at the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, was it not this lack of superstructural development in a broad sense that was one of the causes, 25 or so years later, for the 'dissolution of the [Soviet] State' and its satellites, which had made 'Marxism-Leninism' their official ideology?

110 Regarding Gramsci's harsh criticism of 'pure economics' and his starting point represented by an a-historical *homo oeconomicus*, see in particular Notebook 10, II, §32 (FS, 171–3); however, see the following note on the validity and necessity for such conceptual abstractions.

> not on the indeterminate basis of a generalised, historically indeterminate man … but on that of actual reality, 'historical description', which provides the real premise for constructing scientific hypotheses … It is not for nothing that economic science was born in the modern era when the extension of the capitalist system made a relatively homogeneous type of economic man widespread, i.e. when it created the real conditions by reasons of which a scientific abstraction became relatively less arbitrary and less generically devoid of substance than had hitherto been possible.[111]

It is thus clear that in order for a new economic science to arise it would be necessary to wait for the completion of the transition to the regulation of the economy and society on a world scale, as it did not suffice to this end that there was 'socialism in a single country', which Stalin said had been achieved at that time in Russia, and toward which Gramsci's criticisms became increasingly harsh. As noted above, Gramsci 'could not arrive an any definitive "theoretical" solution. This did not mean that his interpretation of Marx was dismissive; he simply suggested turning the page on Marxism. On the contrary, his position reveals a way of reacting toward Marxist thought that perhaps is the only practicable alternative'.[112]

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111 Notebook 10, II, § 37.1 (FS, 165–6); see also the preceding § 15 (FS, 166–7: 'Every social form has its "homo oeconomicus", i.e. its own economic activity'), as well as Notebook 11, § 52 (SPN, 410–14). This involves 'one of the basic concepts of economic science that is as plausible and necessary as all the abstractions on which the natural sciences are based (and, albeit in a different form, the historical or humanistic sciences)' (Notebook 17, § 52; FS, 305).

112 Lichtner 1991, p. 129; 'there certainly is theoretical uncertainty in Gramsci; however, in my opinion, the perennial non-definitiveness of his "theories" depends above all on the nature of *translation*, for which no formulation should be taken in and of itself, as everything always has another meaning to itself' (ibid., p. 126, note 83).

PART 2

The Analysis of Several Internal Dynamics of the Notebooks

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CHAPTER 4

The 'Alternatives' to Structure-Superstructure

The first chapter of this book pointed out that, from a certain moment on, Gramsci became increasingly unsatisfied with the way in which – in the Marxist vulgate and also in his own thinking until the initial phase of the *Notebooks* – the problem of the structure-superstructure relationship was framed, as well as with the terminology used to define it: in fact, the metaphor of a foundation on which a construction arises would seem to exclusively imply a deterministic interpretation of the relations between the two components, which, in the final analysis, can only be in the nature of cause and effect. Therefore, the moment he no longer believed in the validity of this framework – while at the same time not willing simply to overturn it (since, in fact, the 'opposite extreme', idealistic voluntarism, is merely the other side of the mechanistic 'deviation' of the philosophy of practice) – Gramsci felt the need to also change the lexical form of his discourse, often turning to images that were 'alternative' to the initial one.

To this end, and with a procedure that seems paradoxical only if one does not consider similar ones employed with expressions such as 'national-popular',[1] 'conformism', etc., Gramsci uses conceptual links quite worn from use, often assigning them a different value when they are not contrary to their current value. This allowed him, on the one hand, to 'annoy imbeciles' (an intention made explicit in regard to 'conformism'),[2] and on the other to adopt 'categories' which, thanks to their previous use (in common language as well as in the

1 On this 'fundamental and highly disputed Gramscian dypthology' see the views of Sanguineti, 'Introduzione' to Gramsci 1997, p. XXI, as well as the more recent Durante 2004, pp. 150–69, and Paladini Musitelli 2008, pp. 813–37, and the bibliography therein contained.

2 In Notebook 14, § 61 (CW, 124–5), after extolling 'a "rational" form of conformism that corresponds to necessity', which is opposed to spontaneity and sincerity if these are understood as 'the maximum degree of individualism, even in the sense of idiosyncrasy (in this case originality is equal to idiom)', Gramsci states: 'Conformism, then, means nothing other than "sociality", but it is nice to use the world "conformism" precisely because it annoys imbeciles'. See also the letter dated 5 October 1931, that speaks of '"conformism" (not understood in a herdlike or passive sense)' (LP II, 81–4). In fact, as Donzelli states in his Introduction and Comment on Gramsci 1981, p. 46, 'conformism and "collective man" were concepts used in those years as accusations by liberal-democrats against Bolshevism during their ideological controversy'.

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Notebooks) in different contexts and with different meanings, were extremely malleable when applied to his new concepts. Nevertheless, the greater or lesser success these categories would meet with in their new 'philosophical' role would also (and above all) depend on their original role, as will be shown below.

1 'Quantity and Quality'

As regards the use of this conceptual nexus, the *Notebooks* can be viewed as having different phases with very distinct characteristics; only in the third phase does this nexus take on the role of an 'alternative' to that between structure and superstructure, which in the meantime, after the crisis caused by the anti-deterministic evolution of Gramsci's thought, would be definitively abandoned. Nevertheless, a brief examination also of the other moments is useful in understanding the development of this theme as well as its relationship with others dealt with in the present work.

The first period, which lasted until October 1930, is characterised by a rather varied use of the image in question, which nevertheless can be traced back to three fundamental contexts whose single common element is the negation of the opposition between the two terms – or at least the dialectical nature of these terms, which were already present in the Hegelian and Engelsian sources of Gramsci's discourse – which would subsequently make it possible to substitute the architectural metaphor in the description of the historical movement. The contexts in question are:

1) a use tied to the controversy on 'Americanism',[3] beginning with Notebook 1, § 143 (February–March 1930): '*Quality and quantity*. In the world of production this means nothing more than *cheap* and *dear* … All the rest is an ideological serial novel … the call for "Quality" means only the desire to employ a lot of labor on a small quantity of material'. This is possible 'where there is an abundance of raw materials', in which case 'it is possible to have both methods, the qualitative and the quantitative'; in fact, 'quantitative production can also be qualitative … In short, one is dealing with a formula for idle men of letters and demagogic politicians who bury their heads in the sand to avoid witnessing reality. *Quality* should be attributed to men, not to things'. In short, as stated in Notebook 3, § 68 (August 1930), 'quantity versus quality, for

3 In this regard see Nacci 1989, in particular pp. 46 ff.

example', is nothing other than one 'of Ferrero's clichés' (regarding which Gramsci polemicised starting from his political writings as a youth, and which, in § 64 of Notebook 1, he had compared to Lorianism), which 'have entered into circulation and continue to be used without remembering the coinage and the mint';

2) a use linked to the criticism of Bukharin's *Manual*, but actually not differing much from the use adopted by Bukharin; in Notebook 4, § 25 (May–August 1930) Gramsci in fact had written that

> the ensemble of the material forces of production is the *least variable* element in historical development … The *variability* of the ensemble of the [material] forces of production can be measured as well, and one can establish rather accurately the point at which its quantitative development becomes qualitative.

In effect, despite Gramsci's criticisms shortly thereafter (Notebook 4, § 32, written between September and October of that same year) of the author of the *Popular Manual* for not having linked the statement 'that every society is something more than the mere sum of its parts … to another observation, by Engels, that quantity becomes quality',[4] Bukharin himself had defined 'the passage from quantity to quality' as 'one of the fundamental laws of the movement of material', correctly recalling its Hegelian origins;[5]

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4 Such a proposition, continues Gramsci, represents 'a characteristic feature of historical materialism', for which 'quality is closely connected to quantity, indeed, its most fruitful and original element resides in this connection'.

5 Bukharin 1977, pp. 80 ff. In fact, Hegel speaks of a 'return to quality' of 'quantity': 'We measure, e.g. the length of different chords that have been put into a state of vibration, with an eye to the qualitative difference of the tones caused by their vibration, corresponding to this difference of length. Similarly, in chemistry, we try to ascertain the quantity of the matters brought into combination, in order to find out the measures or proportions conditioning such combinations, that is to say, those quantities which give rise to definite qualities' (§ 106). Instead Gramsci – who had this book in prison (cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 3131), but never quotes from it in the *Notebooks* – does not explicitly mention the Hegelian origins of the nexus 'quantity-quality', which he certainly was aware of: in fact, even Croce speaks of this in the *Noterelle di critica hegeliana* at the end of *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel*, placed at the conclusion of his *Saggio sullo Hegel*, defining the 'transition from Quality to Quantity … another badly concealed *hiatus*: Hegel undertook another, merely extrinsic transition, presenting it as dialectic' (Croce 1913, p. 187). Gramsci refers to this book by

3) a use that can be defined as 'weak' and that occurs in the most varied contexts: thus, in Notebook 1, § 153 (May 1930) Gramsci searched for 'the qualitative as well as quantitative (mass extension) changes that technical development of the organization of culture brought'; in the contemporary Notebook 3, § 11 he wrote 'a difference of degree, not quality', in the 'welcome' Paris and Berlin reserved for 'Americanism'. Notebook 3, § 48 (June–July) stated that between the 'modern theory' (Marxism) and 'the "spontaneous" sentiments of the masses', there can be no opposition but 'a "quantitative" difference – of degree not of quality; it should be possible to have a reciprocal "reduction", so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa'. In fact, as he had stated shortly before in Notebook 4, § 3, the task of 'enlighten[ing] the minds of the popular masses … which was fundamental, has absorbed all its energies, not only "quantitatively" but also "qualitatively"'.

Of these three meanings of the dialectic between quantity and quality, only the last overcame that great divide represented by the 'formulation' in Notebook 4, § 3. The explanation for this is not difficult to find: regarding the discourse on 'Americanism', Gramsci had judged the formula in question totally inadequate for characterising it; as concerns historical materialism, Engels's thesis (Bukharin's as well) of a nearly automatic transition from quantity to quality could not be shared, due to its mechanistic and deterministic tone, by one about to make opposition to this tendency one of the main points of his work. Thus began a second phase in the use of 'quantity-quality', where the range of its meaning further increased, consequently further weakening its weighty force. As a result, we find in Notebook 4, § 50 (November 1930) expressions such as 'normal transition from quantity (age) to quality (intellectual and moral maturity)'; or, in Notebook 7, § 12 (November–December), 'an "orderly" assembly of quarrelsome and unruly individuals unites around collective decisions that are superior to those of the average individual: quantity becomes quality'. Gramsci uses the same exact words in the contemporary Notebook 5, § 123 to describe the transition from pre-humanism to true humanism; and in the subsequent § 131 he identifies in the 'improvement' of language an aspect 'both quantitative (the acquisition of new modes of expression) and qualitative (the acquisition of the nuances of meaning and of a more complex syntax and style)'. Then in Notebook 6, § 78 (probably March 1931),[6] he writes that 'Cavour's liberals … go beyond Solaro's Right (though not qualit-

Croce several times: cf. the Notebooks 4, § 18; 10, II, § 41.viii (FS, 419–20); 11, § 44 (FS, 298–303); as well as Gerratana, *Q*, 2372 and 2433; LP I, 256–9.

6 Cf. above, note 15 to Chapter 3.

atively)', while in Notebook 7, §96 (end of 1931) he defines '*Artisan workshop, small, medium sized, and big industry*',[7] as 'quantitative concepts and qualitative concepts'.

This last text represents the end of the second phase in the use of the quantity-quality dichotomy, which had by then become completely timeworn; it is no coincidence that it does not appear all through the first part of 1932 – except for its use in Notebook 8, §216 (March), where, with regard to the world economic crisis under way Gramsci notes 'quantity becomes quality. In other words, the crisis is now *organic* and no longer *conjunctural*' –[8] only to then reappear, entirely transformed, at the end of May: which was typical of the conceptual evolution of the *Notebooks*, as shown elsewhere by other examples. Only with regard to this new 'direction' in his prison writings is Dario Ragazzini's opinion valid: that Gramsci characterises the 'molecular' transition from quantity to quality 'in terms of Marxism as a theory of transformation without collapse', so that 'within the inadequate terminological wrapping, deriving from physics and chemistry, which could validate an accumulative and continuative interpretation, there is instead a conception of the individual and society as a relational whole, one may even say of a systemic type'.[9] In this specific case (Notebook 10, II, §9, from May; SPN, 399–402), Gramsci is speaking of the

> laws of tendency which are not laws in the naturalistic sense or that of speculative determinism, but in a 'historicist' sense … Economics studies these laws of tendency in so far as they are quantitative expressions of phenomena; in the passage from economics to general history the concept of quantity is integrated with that of quality and of the dialectic quality-that-becomes-quality.

7 As usual, the italics indicate the title of the section.

8 To better show its progressive decline, note that it returns only twice in the 1931 notes and in one note in 1932 (compared to the twelve occurrences in 1930); moreover, referring only to the *Notes on Philosophy*, we find three occurrences in the first series (in the A texts, subsequently taken up again in the 'special' notebooks) and only one in the second and third (and in a B text, for that matter). Finally, note this other statistical fact: if the fifteen notes heretofore cited are ordered chronologically, eight of the first nine would undergo a second draft, contrary to the six subsequent ones (all only in single draft). The timeline for these two sequences comes up again in November 1930, immediately after the 'arrangement' of Notebook 4, §38, which was also fundamental in the development of the *Notebooks*.

9 Ragazzini 2002, p. 38.

The placement of this note in Notebook 10, one of the two 'philosophical notebooks *par excellence*',[10] and its title – *Introduction to the Study of Philosophy* – accentuate its importance. In addition it shows that Gramsci is trying to substitute this new (or better yet, renewed) dialectical nexus for the one between structure and superstructure, which revealed itself to be inadequate for solving 'the crucial problem' of how the historical movement, and others linked to it, are produced.

This is confirmed by several additions during this period to the second draft of previous texts: in particular, in Notebook 12, § 1 (SPN, 5–33; nearly contemporary with the above-quoted passage)[11] he notes in regard to the question of the scientific equipment in a country that 'in this field also, quantity cannot be separated from quality'; this represents an innovation with respect to the A text in Notebook 4, § 49, but above all a notable simplification of problems such as: 'are libraries structure or superstructure? And what about the testing laboratories of scientists? Or the musical instruments of an orchestra? etc.' which the sequence (logical and chronological, to use Gramsci's words) of 'social structure-superstructure-material structure of the superstructure'[12] was certainly not able to resolve. Similarly, in Notebook 11, § 12 (written between June and July 1932; SPN, 323–43), after reaffirming that 'the intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively', the following excerpt from Notebook 8, § 169:

> The insistence on 'practice' … means that one is still in a relatively rudimentary historical phase, it is still the economic-corporative phase in which the general framework of the 'structure' is transformed;

was transcribed as follows:

> Insistence on the practical element of the theory-practice nexus … means that one is going through a relatively primitive historical phase, one which is still economic-corporate, in which the general 'structural' framework is being *quantitatively* transformed and the appropriate *quality-*

10 Francioni 1984, p. 94.

11 All of Notebook 12 can, in fact, be dated in all probability to May–June 1932.

12 Notebook 4, § 12 (analysed in Ch. 1, § 2 in the first part of this work to reveal Gramsci's initial 'Bukharinism'). Naturally this does not preclude that in the very same Notebook 12 § 1 there is room also for the 'weak' meaning of quantity-quality found in Notebook 4, § 50, along with all of the relative sections, representing a further example of the juxtaposition between old and new in the C texts emphasised several times above.

> superstructure is in the process of emerging, but is not yet organically formed.[13]

Similarly, regarding the long-standing problem of historical prediction Gramsci, in order to counter those who believed it was possible '"to foresee" the future of society', had an additional weapon in Notebook 11, § 15 (July–August 1932; SPN, 437–40) with respect to the A text (written shortly before) in Notebook 8, § 197 (February) to demostrate that

> in reality one can 'scientifically' foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle, which cannot but be the results of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities since within them *quantity is continually becoming quality*.[14]

This same weapon was used in Notebook 11, § 26 (July–August 1932; SPN, 425–7), in the battle against the 'vulgar evolutionism' that 'cannot know the dialectical principle with its passage from quantity to quality'.[15] These words are in sharp contrast to the subsequent § 30 (SPN, 465–8, written during the same period), which exactly reproposes the formulation in Notebook 4, § 25, according to which this passage could be determined with absolute precision: this should not be surprising, as it is another of the many examples of a mechanical recopying of an A text in a C text, which does not necessarily imply the author's complete adherence to the content. The same cannot be said for Notebook 11, § 32 (August 1932; SPN, 468–70), where the reaffirmed close connection in Notebook 4, § 32 between quantity and quality as part of Marxism takes on a different, if not opposite significance, to the first draft, precisely in virtue of the new significance this dialectic had assumed as well as its being attributed to Marx rather than Engels.[16]

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13 Italics added; note that the A text, compared to which this represented undoubted progress, was written only shortly before (November 1931) and was already sufficiently advanced in an antideterministic sense, as already evident from the use of inverted commas for 'structure'.

14 The added italics indicate that, as on previous occasions, changes were made in the C text compared to the first draft.

15 The A text from Notebook 4, § 13 (May–August 1930) contains no mention of this topic.

16 In fact, the expression goes back to both Marx (first used in *Capital*) and Engels (*Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature*). Regarding the entire question of the relation between Gramsci and Engels see below, Chapter 6, § 2.

This innovation is applied more coherently in several newly drafted contemporaneous texts in Notebook 9: in particular §§ 40 (June 1932), 62 and 65 (July–August 1932). The former concerns the 'study of the third degree or moment of the relations of force' which, as previously mentioned, represented Gramsci's theoretical reformulation of the origin of the historical movement during the second phase of his prison writings, in which he stated that 'one of the main elements are the qualitative conditions of the leadership', which 'could give the victory to forces that are "apparently"[17] inferior to those of the adversaries'. In the second text he presented the 'theorem of the definite proportions … to clarify many arguments regarding organization and general policy (in the analyses of the situations, the relations of force, etc.)', not without underlining that this procedure had 'metaphoric value, and cannot be mechanically applied'. He also observed that the 'cadres' of a party can be 'deficient in terms of quantity and quality, of quantity but not quality (relatively), or for quality and not quantity'; but what is more important is that

> The historical automatism of a certain premise is politically developed by the parties and the 'capable' men: their absence or deficiency (quantitative and qualitative) makes the automatism itself 'neutralising':[18] the premise exists but the consequences are not achieved.

Finally, in the third text Gramsci maintained that

> The determining force can be such not only because it is the quantitatively prevailing force (that which is not always possible is feasible) but because it is the qualitatively prevalent one, and this can occur with the spirit of initiative, if one seizes the 'right moment', if one maintains a continuous state of tension of the will.

Unlike the two preceding notes, this one had only a single version, as if to signal the end of the very short third phase of the use, as an alternative to 'structure-superstructure', of the binomial 'quantity-quality', which thereafter would return to playing the most varied roles (as it had previously done), thereby losing the special semantic force underlined here. However, contrary

17 In the corresponding C text (Notebook 13, § 23; SPN, 210–18) there follows the explanation '(i.e. quantitatively)'.

18 In the C text of Notebook 13, § 31 (SPN, 190–2) there follows the small but significant clarification: '(which anyway is not really automatic)'.

to appearances this did not represent a pure and simple return to the past (for which, moreover, there was no comparison with any other topic in the *Notebooks*), rather the exact opposite: the evolution of Gramsci's thinking on this topic 'consumed' in the span of only a few months (May–August 1932) the possibilities offered by this metaphor, which, though not as 'necessary' as in the beginning (bringing to mind the 'Engelsian-Bukharinian' use), still remained a dichotomy and thus insufficient for expressing Gramsci's latest thinking on the subject. In short, this metaphor had the same fate (with a gap of several months) as previously had befallen the architectural metaphor, which had been the starting point and to which it was thus closely linked. It was therefore not suited to replace it once and for all. In fact, the 'structure'-'quantity' equivalence assumes that the former, as Gramsci wrote in Notebook 4, § 25, 'can be measured at any time with mathematical exactitude', while for some time he had noted (for example, in Notebook 7, § 24) 'the difficulty of identifying the structure at any moment'.

Therefore, already in Notebook 9, § 84 (September 1932) he had written that his research on the *Cosmopolitan Character of Italian Intellectuals* (this is the title of the note) 'must be qualitative in nature'; and in the subsequent Notebook 9, § 136 (November) he defined as 'quantitative-qualitative *so to speak*' the 'Caesarism' of Caesar and Napoleon I, compared to that of Napoleon III, which was 'only, and in limited fashion, quantitative'.[19] In Notebook 10, II, § 50.11 (December; SPN, 363–4) he would write that 'in the idea of progress is implied the possibility of quantitative and qualitative measuring, of "more" and "better"'; in particular, 'one can provide a quantitative measurement of the difference between past and present, since one can measure the extent to which man dominates nature and chance'. Slightly further on, in § 54 of the same Notebook 10 (February 1933; SPN, 353–4), he explained as follows 'the principle … that all men are "philosophers"':

> between the professional or 'technical' philosophers and the rest of mankind, the difference is not one of 'quality' but only of 'quantity'. (The term 'quantity' is being used here in a special sense, which is not to be confused with its meaning in arithmetic, since what it indicates is greater or lesser degrees of 'homogeneity', 'coherence', 'logicality', etc.; in other words, the quantity of qualitative elements.)

19 The italics, already in the text, highlight the further distancing by Gramsci from a terminology that even here, for reasons of convenience (or 'inertia') he continues to use. On the phenomenon of 'Caesarism' see below, Chapter 6, § 1.

This latter proposition in truth complicates the question rather than simplifying it; and, in any event, contributes to further weakening the image being examined, while the use of inverted commas appears to indicate the gradual distancing of the author from the terminology adopted. In the same way, in the *Autobiographical Notes* in Notebook 15, §9 (February–March) Gramsci observed that 'the gradual change in the moral personality … at a certain point is transformed from quantitative to qualitative';[20] furthermore, reflecting on the distance between the old and new generations in §68 of the same notebook (July 1933), he laments the fragility of the 'intermediate ring [which] is never totally absent but can be "quantitatively" very weak'.

Lessening the rigidity of the various moment just now outlined are two notes from this fourth phase of the use of 'quantity-quality' that appear linked to the third and first, respectively: Notebook 10 II, §50.11 (February 1933; SPN, 363–4) and Notebook 22, §11 (the second half of 1934; SPN, 301–6). Nevertheless their 'deformity' is more apparent than real. In fact, while it is true that in this last note Gramsci wrote, as an addition to the A text from which it derived (Notebook 4, §52), that 'in Europe it is the passive residues that resist Americanism (they "represent quality", etc.)', undoubtedly referring to the first notes he had written on the topic (which have been analysed above), the inverted commas suggest a polemical tone directed again at the theses of Guglielmo Ferrero, as explicitly stated in §8 of Notebook 22 (which recall Notebook 1, §143; SPN, 307–8). Similar reasoning can be applied to the text in Notebook 10:

> *Quantity and quality*. Since there cannot exist quantity without quality or quality without quantity (economy without culture, practical activity without intelligence and vice-versa) any opposition of the two terms is, rationally, nonsense. And, indeed, when we get the opposition of quantity and quality with all the idiotic variations on the theme practised by Guglielmo Ferrero and Co., what are really being opposed are one form of quality and another form of quality, one form of quantity and another form of quantity. In other words, [it is] a matter of politics and not a philosophical proposition.

20 A further development taken from this meaning can be gleaned from the above-quoted 1937 letter to his son Delio: 'Quantity becomes quality for man and not for other living beings, or so it would seem' (LP II, 378); however, Gramsci's death shortly thereafter does not allow us, in the absence of other evidence in this regard, to verify if this is an episodic and incidental expression or destined in its intentions to be further developed.

Not even Gramsci intends to present here 'a philosophical proposition', which, moreover, at this point in the *Notebooks* was already evident, but once again to oppose his ideal interlocutor on his own ground, as occurred in those later notes in which for polemical reasons he continued to use the already obsolete terms 'structure' and 'superstructure'. Moreover, more importantly, the contrary never occurred; that is, there are no passages belonging to the third phase in the use of 'quantity-quality' that play a similar role to those of the others, which indicates that only in this phase does that expression take on the role of an alternative to the architectural metaphor.

2 'Content and Form'

This dichotomy, if compared to that just analysed, immediately reveals its own characteristics, which in the final analysis depend on its greater, and above all immediate, adherence to the 'structure-superstructure' nexus, which for 'quantity-quality' would only occur subsequently and on a limited basis in only a few notes. In fact, if strictly speaking this could be defined as an alternative to the architectural image, the 'content-form' dichotomy can be said to be synonymous, as, moreover, was also the case in Marx, starting from the 1859 *Preface* that distinguishes between 'the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out'.[21]

In fact, the binomial 'content-form' immediately presents upon its first appearance (in two notes from May 1930) both these functions – that pertaining to a literary analysis and that of metaphor to represent the relation between material and ideological conditions in future historical events – which were, moreover, closely connected. Thus, if in Notebook 1, § 150 Gramsci writes that one 'can conceive the state only as the concrete form of a specific economic world', and therefore 'a similar content calls for a similar political form', Notebook 4, § 5 refers to 'controversies over form and content' in the 'criticism of art'; moreover, in the latter case Gramsci uses, in order to explain the synonymity of these two terms, expressions such as 'analyses of content' and 'criticism of

21 Marx 1987, p. 263 (see Gramsci's translation in Notebook 7 (Gramsci 2007, p. 746)). In Bukharin's *Manual* 'form' is understood in "Aristotelian" terms as the determining factor, and thus as the 'method of production', 'structure' (see Bukharin 1977, p. 129 and *passim*).

the "structure" of works' with the same meaning.[22] For purposes of the present work, this aspect will only be dealt with as concerns the correlations regarding the 'crucial problem',[23] omitting the exclusively 'literary' pages. *A fortiori* the use of this image will not be considered, which, along with 'quantity-quality', could be defined as 'weak'. In fact, it is even less relevant than in the preceding case. Only its first two occurrences (in Notebook 1, §§ 29 and 48) will be cited as an example: the former (dating to October 1929) distinguished the 'passionately "*positive* sarcasm"' (of which 'in Marx we find the highest expression') 'from other forms, whose content is the opposite to that of Marx'; for example, '"right wing sarcasm" which is rarely passionate but is always "negative", purely destructive not only of the contingent "form" but of the "human" content', of the 'popular "illusions"'. In § 48 (February–March 1930) Gramsci instead spoke of the 'Jacobinism (of content)', in opposition to '*Charles Maurras' reverse Jacobinism*'.[24]

It is necessary instead to return briefly to the first of the quoted texts to underline the perfect synonymity between 'content'-'structure', on the one

22 The fact that the category in question appears with a 'strong' meaning in a miscellaneous note, and at the same time, in the common 'literary' use, in a 'philosophical' context, when one would instead expect the exact opposite, only confirms two concepts mentioned several times above: 1) the distinction between scattered notes and monographic notebooks is less clearcut than is still often thought today; 2) often the 'political' notes (§ 150 of Notebook 1 is entitled *The conception of the state from the standpoint of the productivity* (*function*) *of the social classes*) are more 'advanced' than the 'theoretical' ones (§ 5 of Notebook 4 is entitled *Historical materialism and practical criteria or canons of historical and political intepretation*).

23 The fact these two problems cannot be separated, but, on the contrary, one (the 'artistic') is nothing other than a specific aspect of the general one, is confirmed, for example, by this passage where, after citing the famous statement by Croce that 'poetry does not generate poetry; the parthenogenesis does not take place; there is need for the intervention of the male element, of that which is real, passionate, practical, moral', Gramsci comments: 'This observation could befit historical materialism. Literature does not generate literature etc.; *in other words, ideologies do not create ideologies, superstructures do not generate superstructures* other than as a legacy of inertia and passivity. They are not generated through "parthenogenesis" but through the intervention of the "masculine" element – history – which is the revolutionary activity that creates the "new man" (that is, new social relations)' (Notebook 6, § 64; italics added to show that in a note entitled *Father Bresciani's progeny* Gramsci once again speaks of the 'chief world systems'; see also the subsequent § 71, which dates to, along with the previous one, between December 1930 and March 1931).

24 The italics indicate the title of the note; on this topic, see also Notebook 6, § 89.

hand, and 'form'-'superstructure' on the other; in fact, it is possible to substitute the second term in both pairs for the first and state that one 'can conceive the state only as the concrete *superstructure* of a specific economic world … A similar *structure* calls for a similar *superstructure*'. In this way the rather deterministic perspective of the passage becomes even more evident and anything but unexpected, if one considers that, on the one hand, as emphasised on several occasions above, this is characteristic of the first phase of the prison writings; and on the other, the same image chosen by Gramsci again implies a rigid stance on the question; as if, no longer representing a relation between the structural base and the superstructural construction, that between a 'content' and its 'form' must represent a relation between conditioning and conditioned. This is confirmed by the fact that during the same period (May 1930) Gramsci, in beginning his notes on *Canto 10 of the Inferno* in Notebook 4, § 78 and dealings with 'the question of "structure and poetry" in the *Divine Comedy* according to B. Croce and Luigi Russo', clearly opposes the thesis of the two critics of Dante that poetry is absolutely preeminent with regard to structure, stating the opposite is true: 'Analyses of the *structure* should have led to a more accurate aesthetic evaluation of the canto', since Dante 'provides the reader with the components for reconstructing the drama, and these components are furnished by the structure … The structural passage, then, is not merely structure, it is also poetry, it is a necessary element of the drama that has taken place'.[25]

In a note a bit further on regarding the importance of '*The military element in politics*' and the result that could ensue from its prevalence in certain situations, he states that the 'specific solution' one could reach from time to time can also be referred to as 'the "form" of such a solution':[26] this can vary from time to time; in fact 'in every country the process is different, although the content is the same'.[27] For more than a year thereafter the binomial 'content-form' would appear only a few times and exclusively in 'weak' or 'aesthetic' contexts, some of which were nevertheless not without interest for the theme of the present

25 Somewhat later on (probably during the first few months of the following year) Gramsci would say: 'The fact that there exists a close relationship between Cavalcante and Farinata in Dante's poems is shown by the letter and the structure of the canto' (Notebook 4, § 83).

26 Notebook 4, § 66 (November 1930); the italics indicate the title of the note. In the corresponding C text of Notebook 13, § 23 (SPN, 167–8; 210–18) Gramsci also explained the other extremity, 'content'.

27 Notebook 4, § 69 (contemporary with the previous one); these texts will be discussed in reference to 'Caesarism' (cf. below, Chapter 6, § 1).

book,[28] since they anticipate the two features of the formula in its subsequent 'philosophical' use:

1) first, the complementarity between its two terms (previously counterposed) was affirmed: already in Notebook 5, § 94 (October–November 1930) Gramsci denies the 'distinction between poetry of form and poetry of content'; in Notebook 6, § 62 (December 1930–March 1931) he reiterates 'the unity of form and content' as a condition for the 'immediate contact between the reader and the writer';[29]
2) subsequently he posits the equivocal relation between the two, so that 'no new historical situation, regardless of how radical the change that caused it, transforms language completely, at least not in its external formal aspect' (Notebook 8, § 171, November 1931).[30] There is a clearcut analogy here with the parallel passages that claimed relative autonomy for the superstructures, or the fact that a change in the structure did not mean that the superstructure necessarily and immediately had to change, thereby reaffirming the theoretical possibility alone of a distiction between the two spheres.

The eclipse of the 'philosophical' use of the content-form binomial is related to what occurred with the 'structure-superstructure' pairing throughout 1931 and in particular to the doubts concerning the mechanistic interpretation of the relation between its two components in terms of cause and effect.[31] The only exception, albeit notable ones, were the above-mentioned extemporaneous observations in Notebook 7, § 21 (written perhaps at the beginning of that year), in which Gramsci speaks of the

28 Other notes instead concern only the 'literary' aspect of the question (see, for example, Notebook 5, § 123; Notebook 8, § 9, etc.). As stated above, these will not be treated in this book.

29 Also compare these two passages from contemporary letters: while on 6 October 1930, Gramsci could still hold that 'Chesterton is a great artist' because in him there 'is a stylistic gap between the content, the detective story plot, and the form' (LP I, 353–4), on 4 November he wrote to his wife Giulia that 'analysis demonstrates to me or helps me to understand whether between form and content there is complete adherence' (LP I, 359).

30 This topic would be further developed in Notebook 9, § 15 (April–May 1932): 'The language is modified, at its sense level, much less than the cultural content, and only in semantics, naturally, can an adhesion be registered between sense form and intellectual content'.

31 In this regard cf. above, Part 1, Chapter 1, § 4.

> 'historical bloc' in which in fact the material forces are the content and the ideologies are the form. The distinction between form and content is just heuristic because material forces would be historically inconceivable without form and ideologies would be individual fantasies without material forces.

Moreover, this passage represents in a nutshell the 'turning point' in 1932: the shift from placing these two terms in opposition to juxtaposing them. If, on the one hand, this is a result of the more general evolution in an anti-deterministic direction of Gramsci's thinking in general, on the other it is a prelude to the abandonment of both metaphors – the architectural and the 'alternative' ones – since not only does it empty them of meaning, negating the distinction between their two constituent elements, but actually puts them in contrast with themselves, ending up by making them signify the opposite of what their origin and history implied: a construction not only (relatively) independent of its foundations but one even capable of intervening on these, a form (relatively) independent of the content of which it is an expression.

In particular, in Notebook 8, § 201 (February–March 1932) Gramsci contested Bukharin's uncritical acceptance of the 'identification of content with form', which is

> Affirmed by idealist aesthetics (Croce), based on idealist premises and terminology. Therefore, neither 'content' nor 'form' means what the *Manual* supposes. The identity of form and content means nothing more than the fact that in art the content is not the 'abstract subject' – that is, the novelistic plot or some generic complex of sentiments. Rather, the content of art is art itself, a philosophical category, a 'distinct moment' of the spirit, etc. Nor does form mean 'technique', as the *Manual* supposes, etc.[32]

Once again the aesthetic problem is superimposed on the more general one, as in Notebook 10, I, § 7 (second half of May of the same year; FS, 343–6), where the link between the two questions is explicit in Gramsci's providing Croce's 'definition of the concept of ethico-political history', which

32 This text seems to confirm Stipčević 1981, pp. 279–83: 'in Gramsci the Crocean aesthetic equation is transformed in its essence. He understands Croce's teaching on the dependence of form and content … in Gramsci, however, these two concepts have a totally different value … for Gramsci the identity of terms does not signify the identity of concepts'.

> reproduces his formulation of the problem of aesthetics: the ethico-political moment in history is what the moment of form is in art … But things are not so simple in history as they are in art … one can admit the identification of content and form and the so-called dialectic of distincts in the unity of the spirit (it is only a question of translating speculative language into historicist language, i.e. of seeing whether this speculative language has a concrete instrumental value, superior to previous instrumental values). But in history [it] is merely metaphorical.

It is not possible to overlook the coincidental timeline as well regarding a similar condemnation of the 'structure-superstructure' binomial examined above,[33] confirmed here by the suddenness of the event; in fact, the first draft of the above-cited text (Notebook 8, § 227), which dates to only a few weeks before, did not contain the repudiation of 'content-form'. Several pages later, in Notebook 8, § 240 (May), Gramsci observed that

> not even ethico-political history can divorce itself from the concept of 'historical bloc', in which the organism is individualized and rendered concrete by the ethico-political forms but cannot be thought of without its 'material' and practical content. It must be shown this in every single individual action, otherwise one would end up with philosophems rather than history.[34]

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33 Cf. above, Part 1, Chapter 1, § 5.

34 This passage is not significantly different than in the second draft (Notebook 10, I § 13; FS, 358–61), which, moreover, dates to the second half of the same month, indicating that this 'turning point' had already occurred in Gramsci. The problem instead involved the chronological relation between Notebook 8, § 240 and Notebook 10, I § 7 (keeping in mind that Notebook 10, I contained the first detailed *Reference Points for an Essay on B. Croce* contained in this notebook and that it is not possible to provide a more exact date for §§ 1–12 than the period from the middle of April to the middle of May; § 13 instead goes back to the second half of May). If, as appears likely, the text of Notebook 8, § 240 preceded that of Notebook 10, I, § 7, it becomes possible to reconstruct the following 'evolutionary sequence': Notebook 8, § 201: reproposal of the dichotomy between content and form limited to the literary field, but nevertheless implying the identification of its two terms; 2) § 227: lacking an explicit reference, it can be assumed this had not been newly transferred to the 'philosophical' area; 3) § 240: assuming the necessary caution, this transfer took place; 4) Notebook 10, I, § 7: we can assume there was no transfer, if not in a figurative sense; otherwise one must assume there was a transition phase (very short, no more than several weeks) during which Gramsci showed some uncertainty. This second hypothesis is also confirmed by a comparison with similar moments and 'border areas' in the *Notebooks*.

From that moment on, the dialectic between content and form returned to its original context, though there remained the need for the non-opposition between the two elements, contrary to what had occurred in the first few notebooks. However, this also limited the weight of this dichotomy in this area, allowing it to only play the role of a polemical contraposition to those who viewed the elements as being distinct.[35] This development had already become inadequate for Gramsci's political theory since, in addition to identifying structure and superstructure in the 'historical bloc',[36] he began research that only his psychic-physical collapse would interrupt. It is for this reason that, in the theoretical area, the 'content-form' dichotomy recurs only once, and again in a controversy with Croce, in Notebook 10, II, § 41.XVI (August–December 1932; FS,

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We will skip over the subsequent § 8 of Notebook 10, I (FS, 346–8) in which 'the subjective conception of reality' (idealism) is said to be 'simply a practical act, the form assumed by a concrete social content'. On the 'transitional' nature of this section see Lichtner 1991, p. 86.

35 Cf. Notebook 9, § 124 (September–November 1932): 'new art content … cannot be conceived of as abstractly distinct from form'; Notebook 14, § 14 (December 1932–January 1933): 'art is always tied to a specific culture or civilization', and thus 'in struggling to reform the culture we tend and we manage to modify the "content" of art'; Notebook 14, § 15 (January 1933, CW 140–4): Pirandello is 'really a poet, where his critical attitude becomes artistic content-form and not just an "intellectual polemic" '; Notebook 14, § 72 (February 1933, CW, 203–6): '*Content and form*. In the criticism of art the bringing together of these two terms can take on many meanings. To grant that content and form are the same thing does not mean that we cannot distinguish between them … Can one speak of a priority of content over form? One can in this sense: that the work of art is a process and that changes of content are also changes of form. It is "easier", though, to talk about content than about form because content can be logically "summarized". When one says that content precedes form, one simply means that in the process of elaboration successive attempts are presented under the name of content and that is all. The first content that was unsatisfactory was also form and, in reality, when one arrives at a satisfying "form", the content has also changed'. And in Notebook 15, § 20 (May 1933; CW, 117–19), with regard to the 'controversy between "contentists" and "calligraphists" ': 'Since no work of art can be without a content … it is evident that the "contentists" are simply the bearers of a new culture, a new content, while the "calligraphists" are the bearers of an old content, an old or different culture'. The same text contains this passage as well, which represent the overturning of the passage where art was rigidly made to depend on history (cf. above, note 23); not because now Gramsci states that 'it is possible that a new civilization, said to exist already, can fail to have its own literary and artistic expression', but because 'historically the opposite has always occurred. Every new civilization … has always expressed itself in literary form before expressing itself in the life of the state'. These concepts are also affirmed in the contemporaneous Notebook 15, § 38 (CW, 108–10).

36 On this last conceptual link see below, § 4.

376–7), where it achieved its maximum amount of 'elasticity' while at the same time being altered. Once again Gramsci criticised the father of Italian neo-idealism for having proposed 'a form of preconceptualised history, in which ideology has not political "content" but the form and method of struggle as its foundation'; however, in principle the political aspect was equated with the latter, in this way taking away its material referent by taking on the meaning of 'arbitrary elucubrations of particular individuals' which elsewhere characterise 'the pejorative sense of the term' *ideology*.[37] In any event, the original meaning of the formula had by then been lost, which Gramsci appeared to be fully aware of at the moment he felt the need to place 'content' in inverted commas in order to better differentiate its meaning from the original one, synonymous with 'economy' or 'structure'. Moreover, the problem was spelled out beginning with the initial pages of the *First Notebook*, where in the list of the *Main topics* regarding the relation between 'structure' and 'art' in the *Divine Comedy*, *structure* had been inserted between the lines as a correction of the early use of *economy*.

This latter usage no longer appeared in the *Notebooks*, apart from second drafts of previous notes (which, moreover, reveal a greater use of inverted commas to indicate a certain distancing from this usage), which, as already observed for other contexts, are somewhat less significant when they are mere mechanical transcriptions;[38] on the other hand, they are very interesting when they present formal and substantial changes with respect to the original texts. In this regard, the most significant example is from Notebook 10, II, § 61 (February, or February–May 1933; SPN, 114–18), in which Gramsci takes up again after three years the note from Notebook 1, § 150, which maintained that it was the political form that was determined by the economic content, in clear contrast above all to what he himself had stated three years earlier:

> the conception of the State according to the productive function of the social classes cannot be applied mechanically … Although it is certain that for the fundamental productive classes (capitalist bourgeoisie and modern proletariat) the State is only conceivable as the concrete form of a specific economic world, of a specific system of production, this does

37 Cf., for example, Notebook 7, § 19.

38 Reference here is in particular to Notebook 11, §§ 16 and 19 (SPN, 452–7 and 471–2), compared to Notebook 8, §§ 171 and 201; to Notebook 21, *Problems of Italian National Culture. First Popular Literature*, § 1 (CW, 199–202), compared to Notebook 14, § 14; to Notebook 23, §§ 3 and 6 (CW, 93–8), compared to Notebook 4, § 5; and to Notebook 9, § 124, considering only the texts regarding the 'philosophical' level.

> not mean that the relationship of means to end can be easily determined or takes the form of a simple schema, apparent at first sight.

As with the example described earlier, a clearer rejection of this position could not have been given.

Returning briefly to the notes on Dante before concluding this section, both to verify their connection to the general development of the content-form binomial as well as to formulate a hypothesis on their sudden disappearance. Gramsci's examination is based on a revisiting of the primacy and autonomy Croce gave to 'poetry' with regard to 'structure' (or, as at this point seemed to be established, of 'form' over 'content'), evidently aiming at overturning this without, however, moving away from the dualistic formulation of the problem. Proof of this is contained in a letter from 26 August 1929 (preceding by eight to nine months the actual start of the notes on *Canto 10 of the Inferno*), where Gramsci maintained that his 'little discovery … would *in part* correct B. Croce's thesis on the *Divine Comedy*'.[39]

Nevertheless, during his work Gramsci would quickly change the focus of his attention, similar to what occurred in parallel fashion with the 'crucial problem' of the relation between structure and superstructure. This can be seen from even a brief consideration of the topic of his notes on Dante subsequent to the first one: a contestation of the possible objection that his ana-

39 LP I, 282–5: *in part* (italics added), since Gramsci does not reject the Crocean 'structure-art' (or 'content-form') schema but simply seeks to re-establish within it the primacy of 'structure'. One could thus fully adhere to what Anglani wrote years before the publication of the critical edition of the *Notebooks* in Anglani 1969, p. 346: 'the schema on Canto X reveals a Gramsci in arrears with respect to himself, a prisoner of the literal sense of Croce's discourse and incapable of exploiting that historical-materialism that nevertheless represented the constant method of his approach to Croce's philosophy. This is probably due to the fact that … the bulk of Gramsci's theoretical clarification was still to come (which, however, only a careful critical edition of the *Notebooks* would be able to verify): the problems dealt with in the notes which today represent most of *Historical Materialism* [the first volume of the thematic edition, made up for the most part of notes from Notebooks 10 and 11] which were not yet developed'. More recently Rossi and Vacca 2007, pp. 38–46, have proposed a different interpretation of these notes, which would represent a sort of political communicaton in code between Gramsci and the party; certainly an interesting hypothesis but one that does not exclude the others, but actually confirms the presence of various possible levels and interpretation of the *Notebooks*, and more generally of what Gramsci has left us in his prison writings (letters, appeals, messages, statements, etc.).

lysis represented a sort of 'criticism of the "unexpressed"';[40] a parallel between his interpretation of 'Guido Cavalcanti's disdain' and Lessing's interpretation of the *Laocoon*;[41] an hypothesis on 'the date of Guido Cavalcanti's death';[42] a discussion of articles on this topic;[43] reference to one of his 'Sotto la Mole columns' from 1918.[44] It is for this reason that – despite the fact Gramsci, in 'trying to draft the outline on canto X to be forwarded' to Cosmo, remained convinced that his 'interpretation mortally wounds Croce's thesis on the poetry and structure of the *Divine Comedy*. Without structure there would be no poetry and therefore the structure also has a poetic value'[45] – despite the fact his own university professor showed through Sraffa his approval ('it seems to me that our friend is right on the mark'), he would find it 'more difficult … to show that this intepretation substantially damages Croce's thesis on the poetry and structure', inviting his former student 'to provide additional confirmation of the thesis with some other examples … in some episode of the Inferno or the Purgatorio that has a sculptural quality'.[46] However, after noting that 'there is much that could be said about these notes by Prof. Cosmo',[47] Gramsci abruptly ends the discussion in the following section, 'since one should not care a hoot about the solemn task of advancing Dante criticism'.[48]

The period is May 1932, when Gramsci ends equally abruptly the more general discussion of the relation between 'content' and 'form'; at the moment when the identity between the two is affirmed (in fact, when one begins to move beyond this) there is no longer any sense in continuing to discuss matters in terms of 'structure' and 'poetry', even regarding the *Divine Comedy*. As a result,

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40 Notebook 4, § 79 (May–June 1930).

41 Notebook 4, § 80 (July 1930).

42 Notebook 4, § 81 (written between July 1930 and March 1931).

43 Notebook 4, §§ 82 (contemporary to the previous one) and 84 (May 1932).

44 Notebook 4, § 85 (May 1932). Considering this last note and the subsequent ones as being in some way foreign to the main principle of the Dante notes, discussion on this topic can be held to have terminated (except for subsequent additions) around March 1931, to which § 85 of Notebook 6 also dates (for Francioni, written between March and August). Here once again he returns, though in passing, to the distinction between 'structure' and 'art' in the *Divine Comedy*, which was also made in Notebook 4, § 83. In this regard, see below, note 18 to Chapter 5.

45 LP II, 73–7, from 20 September 1931.

46 Cosmo's answer is recopied by Gramsci in Notebook 4, § 86, from where the quote is taken.

47 Ibid.

48 Notebook 4, § 87.

> the best way to present these observations on canto 10 would be, precisely, in polemical form: to demolish a classic philistine like Rastignac [Vincenzo Morello]; to demonstrate in a drastic and hardhitting, albeit demagogic, fashion that the representatives of a subaltern social group can give short shrift to intellectual pimps like Rastignac in matters of science and artistic taste … and use him as a ball in a solitary game of soccer.[49]

The subsequent note (Notebook 4, § 88), written in August, is little more than a bibliographical memo; the rest of the page is not used, and the space remaining, originally targeted for the Dante notes, was immediately filled (between August and September of that same year) with miscellaneous notes (§§ 89–95), as if to indicate even in this area the definitive abandonment of the 'content-form' conceptual link.

3 'Objective and Subjective'

This additional coupling of terms was used over a long period of time in its original role before taking on that of an alternative to 'structure-superstructure'. In this sense it can be compared to the 'quantity-quality' dialectic and distin-

49 Ibid. The truth is that Gramsci, in a letter to Tatiana dated 21 March 1932, gave another version of why he had interrupted his studies on Dante: while declaring himself 'satisfied to know that the interpretation of the canto … is relatively new and worthy of treatment', he considers as useless the bibliographical suggestions sent him by Cosmo, in that these were insufficient 'to write an essay for publication', and at the same time excessive 'to write something for myself, to while away the time' (LP II, 151–4; cf. also LP II, 140–1). Nevertheless, this is not entirely reliable evidence for several reasons; above all, throughout his entire prison stay Gramsci *never* wrote anything *simply* 'to while away the time'; moreover, similar statements on the value of what he was writing abound in the letters to his sister-in-law (as well as in the *Notebooks*), but these are never accompanied by the declared intention to abandon the issue to which they refer. Such statements – above all in the case of Benedetto Croce's philosophy regarding his research on intellectuals – on the one hand testify to his awareness of the necessarily limited nature of his prison reflections, and on the other represent part of the particular 'code' of communication between the prisoner, Tatiana, Sraffa and the party (in this regard, see Rossi and Vacca 2007, cited several times above). Finally, his notes on *Canto 10* were definitively interrupted only many months after the quoted letter and, unique among the most important themes he focused on in the *Notebooks*, were not subsequently developed, a sign he had moved beyond them and that they thus were no longer adaptable to his subsequent prison research.

guished from 'content-form'. Nevertheless, contrary to the other two it survived longer after the abandonment of the architectural metaphor, coming to represent one of the main focuses of Gramsci's research, at least until 1934.

Its initial use is linked to 'the most important question concerning science', that is, 'the question of the objective existence of reality',[50] which he dealt with between 1930 and 1931 in several notes in Notebook 4[51] and Notebook 7[52] and which was 'resolved' at the end of 1931 in Notebook 8, § 177:

> *'Objective' reality*. What does 'objective' mean? Does it not mean 'humanly objective' and therefore also *humanly* 'subjective'? It follows, then, that *objective* means *universal subjective*. In other words: the human race *historically* unified in a unitary cultural system.[53]

The solution to the problem cannot, however, be said to be definitive, since Gramsci provided a different, much less categorical version in Notebook 10, II, § 40 (June–August 1932; SPN, 368):

> If reality is as we know it and if our knowledge changes continually – if, that is, no philosophy is definitive but all are historically determined – it is hard to imagine that reality changes objectively with changes in ourselves. Not only common sense but scientific thought as well make this difficult to accept.

Gramsci accepts the point of view of the *Holy Family* – 'the whole of reality is in phenomena and … beyond phenomena there is nothing' – but holds that 'it is not easy to demonstrate. What are phenomena?'; moreover, in this way 'it is difficult not to think in terms of something real beyond' the phenomena themselves, although not of a metaphysical 'noumenon'. Nevertheless, he concludes

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50 Notebook 4, § 41 (October 1930).

51 See, in addition to the text quoted in the preceding note, §§ 7, 37 and 43, written between May and October of the same year. Regarding the second draft of these texts, Ragazzini 2002 states that in the title of Notebook 11, § 64 (SPN, 371–2, taken from § 37 of Notebook 4) the term *objective* appears 'in inverted commas because it is not considered external and static but related to the awareness of the subject and the relation to practice' (n. 29, p. 163).

52 Reference here is to §§ 25 and 47, dating to February and November 1931, respectively.

53 With regard to this text, written between November and December 1931, the subsequent §§ 215 and 217 of Notebook 8 (March 1932) do not contain any relevant changes, and thus are not considered here.

that 'one should study Kant and re-examine his concepts exactly', though this plan appears not to have been carried forward in the subsequent notebooks (in any event, the question of the theory of knowledge, and more generally of Gramsci's views regarding contemporary epistemological problems cannot be dealt with here).[54] Here it will only be observed that, as several scholars have noted, the question of the objectivity of reality was the strongest area of disagreement (even though never explained) between Gramsci and Lenin: in effect, what has just been quoted are 'propositions in flagrant contrast with Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. In fact, Lenin had unhesitatingly favored the point of view of "ingenuous realism" over machism'.[55]

Beyond all this it is important to note the complex and quite flexible relationship that unites the spheres of the 'objective' and 'subjective' in this context. In fact, from the beginning there is no simple opposition but rather a situation of *concordia discors* (unlike the situation with the dichotomies analysed above). This would later allow Gramsci to employ these terms in discussing the problem for which the 'structure-superstructure' coupling – and the other 'alternative' metaphors – would sooner or later reveal itself to be inadequate even in terms of its conceptualisation, not to mention its resolution. This occurred openly for the first time in the second part of Notebook 10, the one Francioni has defined as 'a sort of "fourth series" of *Philosophical Notes*', in which Gramsci tries to go beyond the acquisitions of the first three (where the 'objective-subjective' dialiectic was used only in reflecting on how the cognitive process worked), as testified to by the extremely large number of B texts contained therein.

In particular, in point 1 of Notebook 10, II, §6 (SPN, 336–7), significantly entitled *Introduction to the Study of Philosophy* (second half of May 1932), Gramsci wrote that 'the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure …

54 See in this regard the interesting observation by Kanoussi 2000, in particular pp. 51–112, and Kanoussi 2007, in particular pp. 86–95; Prestipino 2002, pp. 419–502, in addition to the pioneering intuitions of P. Rossi 1976, pp. 41–57. For an overall reconsideration of the relation between Gramsci, science and Soviet Marxism, see the present author's paper: Cospito 2008a. Specific aspects of this complex question have also been dealt with by the author on two other occasions: the relation between *Gramsci and Kant* in Cospito 2012, and the problem of 'Gli strumenti logici del pensiero: Gramsci e Russell', in Cospito 2008b.

55 Bedeschi 1985, p. 199. These, however, are theses shared by almost everyone who has dealt with this question, beginning with Gruppi 1958, which treated 'I rapporti tra pensiero ed essere nella concezione di A. Gramsci', posing the question whether 'part of this controversy' regarding the way in which vulgar materialism views the existence of external reality, entirely similar to that of 'common opinion' and religion, 'did not touch on a series of formulations of Lenin's? It seems so to us', and concluding that Gramsci 'excluded the thesis of knowledge as reflection' (pp. 170 ff.).

also means the passage from "objective to subjective" and from "necessity to freedom"'. Clearly this represents a synonymy between the architectural and 'alternative' metaphors. The link to the previous use of the latter is nevertheless confirmed by point II from the same section (FS, 306), which notes that 'the philosophy of praxis "absorbs" the subjective conception of reality (idealism) into the theory of the superstructures', which is its 'translation in terms of realist historicism'; and above all by the subsequent point III of this section (FS, 402–3), where Gramci again returns to the question of the *'Reality of the External World'*.

Similary, in a note a bit further on, § 23 (June 1932; FS, 168–70), among the *Points to Reflect on for a Study of Economics*[56] Gramsci focuses on 'the objective and subjective conditions' of the 'movement forwards'. The reference here is to post-revolutionary Russia, in which 'labour itself … has taken command of the economy'. Recalling what was presented in the previous chapter regarding Gramsci's view of this experience, it must be noted that, at a time when his thoughts were among the most advanced the later Gramsci had ever had in an anti-deterministic sense, not only was the 'objective-subjective' pairing preferred to the others analysed above, but the *objective: structural vs. subjective: superstructural* opposition had also been overcome, an opposition that had been presented in a section shortly prior of Notebook 10 itself.

However, this identification was not an absolute novelty in that text; as almost always was the case in the *Notebooks*, it represented the coronation of a long and not always straightforward process that only in hindsight, starting from this point, is it possible to reconstruct. Gramsci had already written in Notebook 6, § 94 (between March and August 1931) that 'the national sentiment is not national-popular [but] it is a purely "subjective" sentiment disconnected from objective institutions, factors, realities'. However, apart from the uncertainty regarding the referents of this last term – examples in the text of 'objective elements' are: language, culture, intellectuals, population, journals, the Church, cities, armies, etc., which certainly are not all associated with 'structure' – this innovation is not immediately pursued, as for that matter occurred within the note in which it was contained, which was not rewritten. In fact, in the above-cited note from Notebook 8 (subsequently written between November 1931 and May 1932) the objective-subjective dialectic was once again used exclusively in relation to gnoseological problems. For a (much more mature) application of this, one would have to wait until the spring of 1932, and the decisive anti-mechanistic 'turning point' previously examined.

56 The section heading is in italics.

In fact, in a note from April 1932 (§ 153 of Notebook 8), Gramsci again states that

> necessity has to be transformed into 'freedom' … One must therefore look at the technical relations of production, at a specific way of life and hence specific rules of conduct. One must be persuaded that not only is a certain apparatus 'objective' and necessary but also a certain mode of behavior, a certain education, a certain civilization. In this objectivity and necessity, one can posit the universality of moral principle; indeed, there has never been a universality other than this objective necessity.[57]

In Notebook 8, § 237 (written the following May), the two concepts were used in the same way to define the concept of 'historical "necessity"', this time drawing on Machiavelli's notion of 'fortune'. For Gramsci the concept 'has a double meaning, objective and subjective'.[58] In these last two texts one can note the still almost perfect synonymy in the adjective pairing of 'objective-subjective' with 'structural-superstructural', to which at the moment it represented the optimal 'alternative', as well as with the 'necessity-liberty' link which, unlike the previous 'alternative', would remain in play until the end of the prison reflections. Nevertheless, unlike mathematics, the two equivalences are not 'transitive', that is, the formula *structure : necessity = superstructure : liberty* does not apply. In fact, if during the first phase of the *Notebooks* it is the 'necessitating' nature of the economic base that deprives the overlying politico-ideological construction of 'liberty', subsequently it would be the prophesised 'transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom' that would place in crisis the formulation of the problem of the 'relations of force' in terms of 'structure' and 'superstructure'.

It was only a short conceptual distance from here to §§ 6 and 23 in Notebook 10, II as well as a short time span (not more than several weeks, between May and June 1932). However, what is more important is that, unlike the dichotomy between 'quantity-quality' and 'content-form', the dialectic between 'object-

57 In the corresponding C text (Notebook 16, § 12, written perhaps during the second half of 1934) one finds another confirmation of Gramsci further moving in an anti-deterministic direction during the last phase of his prison activity: in parentheses is the clarification 'this objective necessity … moreover is not obvious, but is in need of those who critically recognize and concretely and "sweepingly" support it', which is equivalent to saying that … it is not a question of *objective necessity*.

58 This section would reappear substantially unchanged in Notebook 11, § 52 (August–December 1932; SPN, 410–14).

ive' and 'subjective' continued to be used in the fundamental 'philosophical' context even beyond the middle of 1932, going beyond being a mere synonym for 'structure-superstructure'. This can be seen through an additional group of quotations from the second part of the *Notebooks*. In Notebook 9, § 67 (July–August 1932; SPN, 201–2), Gramsci, claiming the validity of the worker's council experience (indicated here by the cryptic expression 'movement to valorise the factory') and his wish to import American-brand Taylorist and Fordist methods and employ them in the struggle to transform the capitalist productive organisation, held that this experience 'rendered "subjective" that which is given "objectively". What does objective mean in this instance?' Of interest here is not so much his answer – a 'junction between the requirements of technical development and the interests of the ruling class', which has been treated in the previous chapter – as the fact that the identification between objectivity and economic structure had by then been excluded.

Gramsci writes in Notebook 10, II, § 48.11 (December 1932; SPN, 357–60) that

> the existence of objective conditions, of possibilities or of freedom, is not yet enough: it is necessary to 'know' them, and know how to use them … Man is to be conceived as a historical bloc of purely individual and subjective elements and of mass and objective or material elements with which the individual is in an active relationship.

The same text also adopts the 'quantity-quality' pairing, but in a 'weak' sense,[59] with preference now clearly for the strong use embodied in the 'objective-subjective' pairing; revealed here is thus an ideal 'passing of the baton' between the two 'alternative' images for structure-superstructure.

In Notebook 14, § 24 (January 1933) Gramsci criticised Nietzsche's 'superman' and his literary incarnations for their 'highly "subjective and objective" formalism'; that is, the lack of understanding – and thus the overestimation – of the superman's individual and historical possibilities for action.[60]

In Notebook 15, § 25 (May; SPN, 113–14), which not coincidentally has been cited above in analysing the latest developments regarding the problem of the relation between structure and superstructure,[61] Gramsci writes once again that

59 See above, § 1 of the present chapter.

60 This section is produced without significant changes, at least as regards the passage cited, from Notebook 16, § 13 (CW, 313–14).

61 See above, Part 1, Chapter 1, § 6.

> it is necessary to pose with great precision the problem which *in certain historiographical tendencies*[62] is called that of the relations between the objective conditions and the subjective conditions of an historical event. It seems obvious that the so-called subjective conditions can never be missing when the objective conditions exist, in as much as the distinction involved is simply one of a didactic character. Consequently it is on the size and concentration of subjective forces that discussion can bear, and hence on the dialectical relation between conflicting subjective forces. It is necessary to avoid posing the problem in 'intellectualistic' rather than historico-political terms.

In Notebook 19, § 3 (written during the second half of 1934) Gramsci takes up *Le origini del Risorgimento* (this is the title of the note), redrafting a text from Notebook 9, § 90 (August 1932) in which he had written that 'during the 17th century the objective, international and national conditions begin to take hold which will make national unification a concrete historical undertaking', and that the French Revolution was a decisive event to this end, 'strengthening the positive conditions of the movement' that would lead to the national unity of Italy. In the C text Gramsci specified that these are 'subjective and objective' conditions. The latter, based on what was written in the passage just quoted from Notebook 15, were evidently no longer held to be sufficient by themselves to determine historical events; in this case it was necessary for 'groups of citizens willing to struggle and sacrifice to become aware of … a movement already underway in the "things"'.

Concluding this excursus, what was said at the beginning needs to be reaffirmed: even in the case of the 'objective-subjective' dialectic, as in the other cases previously described, its 'success' in being used as an alternative to 'structure-superstructure' depends on the peculiarities of the pairing in its original (not only Gramscian) use, which, in fact, never contrasted the two terms in question, unlike what initially occurred for *structure* = *content* = *quantity* and *superstructure* = *form* = *quality* (with the additional difference of a cause-effect relation between the terms in the first sequence and those in the second). On the contrary, the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' – as was well understood by

62 Italics added to show a possible distancing by Gramsci even with regard to the objective-subjective binomial, which in fact, apart from the C text in Notebook 19 (quoted below), no longer appears in its extreme formulations of the problem of the relations of force analysed in the section indicated in the preceding note.

one who had been educated on the texts of the neo-idealist Croce and had always considered Marx the heir to classical German philosophy and as having taken it to a higher level – were simply two aspects of a single reality, just as 'economy', 'politics' and 'culture' were in Gramsci's latter meditations (which does not preclude, for exclusively *heuristic* aims, a *methodological* distinction – and a hierarchy of values – among these). It is for this reason that the images examined in the preceding sections lend themselves better to first accompanying and then substituting the 'architectural' image, in which the 'base' and the overlying 'construction' are in a relation of conditioner to conditioned, but which, for the same reason, are destined sooner or later to both be set aside, since they do not allow one to break away from a dichotomic view of society and history. Vice versa, the more 'fluid', 'objective-subjective' dialectic would come onto the scene later but survive longer; it clearly is not mere coincidence that it received its 'philosophical' consecration precisely at the same time, in May 1932, when the literary metaphor, initially destined for a deterministic function, had lost its role.

4 'Historical Bloc'

At this point mention should at least be made of the concept of 'historical bloc' which, while it may not play a perfectly analogous role to the preceding 'alternatives', is certainly closely connected to them, as it represents the summarising formula for the fundamental binomial. Therefore, one can expect it to have a similar development to those pairings mentioned above.

Not by chance its first occurrence was in the *Notes on Philosophy 1*. In § 15 (May–August 1930) Gramsci, in rejecting Croce's thesis that 'for Marx the "superstructures" were an apperarance or an illusion', states that 'they are an objective and operative reality; they just are not the mainspring of history, that's all. It is not ideologies that create social reality but social reality, in its productive structure, that creates ideologies'. This is the eve of the 'arrangement' set out in § 38, where Gramsci assumes a 'centrist' position with respect to the 'opposite extremes', mechanistic determinism and idealistic voluntarism; for now, rather than being central, his position appears to lean more toward 'materialism' rather than 'idealism', perhaps also as a reaction to that of the Neapolitan philosopher. Nevertheless, Gramsci asks the reader to 'recall Sorel's concept of the "historical bloc" … There is a necessary and vital connection between structure and superstructures, just as there is between the skin and the skeleton in the human body … The comparison with the human body … as an apt metaphor to give these concepts a popular formula-

tion'[63] convincingly testifies to the relation between conditioner and conditioned, which in this first phase of the *Notebooks* exists between the two elements of the 'bloc'. The general context of the paragraph should also be underscored; that is, the criticism of Croce's interpretation of historical materialism, which would be a constant in the notes in which the expression 'historical bloc' subsequently recurs, at least when it signifies a 'synthesis' of the economic and politico-ideological condition of a given historical situation. These considerations make it appropriate to leave out, for the moment, another text from Notebook 4 (§ 33 (September–October 1930)), which speaks simply of the 'historical bloc' between leaders and led made possible by the 'organic attachment' of one to the other.[64] Here the phrase evidently signifies a 'very close link' which represents more an extension (but also, as shown above regarding the 'alternatives' to the architectural metaphor, a weakening) of the previously described meaning, rather than a new one entirely.[65]

The Second Series of the *Notes on Philosophy* can now be examined. In the first of these Gramsci, still in heated debate with Benedetto Croce – for whom 'the historical materialist separates structure from superstructures, thus reinstating theological dualism' – reproposes the 'concept of historical bloc', stating that 'in historical materialism, it is the philosophical equivalent of "spirit" in Croce's philosophy', observing that 'the introduction of dialectical activity and a process of distinction into the "historical bloc" does not mean negating its real unity'. This page from Notebook 7, § 1 (November 1930) represents merely a small step forward with respect to Notebook 4, § 15 (emphasis on the elements of unity as opposed to those of distinction within the 'bloc'), unlike what occurred in Notebook 7, § 21 (which nevertheless would remain isolated and not be rewritten) where Gramsci held that it was necessary to 'support the concept of "historical bloc" in which in fact the material forces are the content and ideologies are the form. *The distinction between form and content is*

63 As mentioned above, the correctness of the metaphor would be questioned in the corresponding C text of Notebook 10 II, § 41.XII (FS, 394–9): 'In the human body one certainly cannot say … that the skeleton and the anatomy are the only reality: yet for a long time something similar was said'.

64 The note would reappear, substantially unchanged, in Notebook 11, § 67 (SPN, 418–19).

65 However, according to Canfora 1987, pp. 585 ff., Gramsci gives two formulations 'of "historical bloc", which correspond to two different concepts: a) concrete "historical bloc", that is, an "ethico-political historical bloc", which are expressions which can only indicate a bloc of social forces [an example of which is Notebook 4 § 33 itself]; b) a "concept of historical bloc as understood by Sorel"' (as explicitly recognised in Notebook 4, § 15).

just heuristic'.[66] However, it was the abandonment of this distinction (as shown above, similar to what occurred with regard to 'content-form', 'structure' and 'superstructure') that caused the concept of 'historical bloc' to be put aside rather than used as a 'support'.[67]

This development will be taken up below, as for the moment the changes in the above note have no follow-up. In fact, throughout 1931 the concept of 'historical bloc' has a similar development to that of the other concepts examined earlier; that is, it underwent a period of relative neglect, so much so that by the end of the year Gramsci could write in Notebook 8 §182 (as he had thirteen months earlier)[68] that 'the structure and the superstructure form a "historical bloc". In other words, the complex and discordant ensemble of the superstructures reflects the ensemble of the social relations of production'; even though now his 'reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructures (a reciprocity that is, precisely, the real dialectical process)', and not on the cause-effect relation between the two terms.

The true 'turning point' for this concept also occurred during 1932, which witnessed, in the span of only a few months, the 'explosion' in the use of *historical bloc*. Because of Gramsci's great interest at that time in Croce's work, this term recurred between February and June as often as it had until then,[69] though

66 Italics added.

67 The author thus does not share Nicola Badaloni's view that 'Gramsci arrived at this solution of the relation between structure and superstructure by accepting Sorel's concept of the "historical bloc"' (Badaloni 1981, p. 285). As discussed in the pages below, this concept was the starting point and not the terminus of Gramsci's reflections on the question.

68 It has been noted several times above that the *Notes on Philosophy III* from this period are more closely linked to those from the preceding series than to the subsequent one from Notebook 8 itself, written from February 1932 onwards. Also significant, as Lepre 1978 noted, is the fact that the above-quoted passage was not rewritten (p. 52).

69 This link is confirmed by the statement that the only two exceptions in the letters regarding the expression 'historical bloc' are found in a letter to Tania dated 9 May 1932, (LP II, 170–3) dealing with Croce's *History of Europe*. Moreover, it has long been known that there existed a 'secret conspiracy' between Sraffa and Tatiana Schucht to 'encourage Gramsci to write a critique of Croce regarding the *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*' (Badaloni, Preface to Gramsci 1986, p. 13). As Francioni 1992b wrote (pp. 136–8), 'the idea was Sraffa's, who suggested it to Tatiana when they met in Rome at the beginning of April 1932. She was supposed to pretend to have to "prepare a review for a literary journal" on the *History of Europe*. She immediately wrote to Gramsci [on April 12th]: "you will shortly receive a book by Croce – *La Storia d'Europa – which you should review, since it is of great interest to me and your view could be very useful for my work*". In his answer on April 18th Gramsci agreed to

subsequently being abandoned once and for all, at least in terms of its 'theoretical' use. After mid-1932 it would no longer appear rewritten in subsequent notes. Keeping to the chronological order, in Notebook 8, § 61 (February 1932), another distinction was superimposed on that between structure and superstructure: the distinction between the superstructures themselves. As a result, the 'concept of historical bloc, that is, unity between nature and spirit, unity of opposites and distincts', remained within the structure as a unifiying element. However, it should be underscored that, as seen also from the terminology employed,[70] the end of the note is once again a 'critique of Croce's positions, according to which, controversially, the structure becomes a "concealed God", a "noumenon", in opposition to the "semblance" of superstructure', which represents nothing new with respect to the preceding notes.

In the *Summary* in the first part of Notebook 10 (FS, 328–32) Gramsci wrote that 'credit must therefore be given to Croce's thought for its instrumental value', in that it 'has forcefully drawn attention to the study of the factors of culture and ideas … as the necessary form of the concrete historical bloc'. The period of reference is between the middle of April and the middle of May 1932,

provide her "not with a complete review" … but "some critical notes for you", which he promptly undertook in several letters (in addition to this first one of April 18th) written on the 25th of that month, the 2nd and 9th of May, and the 6th of June 1932', with respect to which the notes in Notebook 8, §§ 225, 227, 233 and 236 represent in some way the minutes. In fact, it is Francioni's belief that the writing in Notebook 8 of the sections in question 'occurred beginning in the middle of April 1932 and after Gramsci had received Tatiana's proposal. Therefore, Gramsci began to focus on several synthetic points in the third series of the *Notes on Philosophy*, which at the time he was still working on. These points were to serve as a quick memorandum (in fact, these notes are extremely schematic, fragmented and haphazard). With these annotations at hand in Notebook 8, he proceeded little by little to write the letters on Croce to his sister-in-law'. The rewriting of these sections in the overall text, which began at c. 41*r* in Notebook 10, I (FS, 328–61, entitled *Reference Points for an Essay on B. Croce*), 'progressed gradually, after each letter. This is confirmed by a comparison of the texts: the letters on Croce are richer in concepts and observations than the concise propositions in Notebook 8; however, at the same time they contain in many cases expressions and sentences identical to those in the texts of Notebook 8 and not to those in the long notes in Notebook 10. On the other hand, they are not as rich, in terms of expression and style as well as content, as the sections in Notebook 10. Thus, the group of letters represents the link between the first and second drafts of the texts in question, and this took place over a short period of time'. On this topic see the interesting observations by Rossi and Vacca 2007, pp. 46–55.

70 It should be recalled that in the relative C text of Notebook 13, § 10 (SPN, 136–8), the Crocean terms 'nature and spirit' are 'translated' in parentheses as 'structure and superstructure', respectively.

and thus any reference to the constituent elements of the 'bloc' had already disappeared, by now no longer distinguishable, if not for 'heuristic' purposes. At least as regards the problem under consideration here, this passage from the *Summary* underwent little substantial change shortly thereafter in § 12 (FS, 357–8) and in the fifth of the *Notes* in § 13 (FS, 358–61).

Thus, in Notebook 8, § 240 (May 1932), Gramsci again formally restated 'the concept of "historical bloc", in which the organism is individualised and rendered concrete by the ethico-political form but cannot be thought of without its "material" and practical content'. However, if, as Gramsci himself claims, 'it must be shown that content and form are identical', then this conception turns into a pure tautology, at least when applied to the analysis of the causes of future history. In fact, what would be the utility in theorising a close dialectical link between two elements already declared to be 'identical'? The only significance that could still be attributed to the concept of 'historical bloc' is thus the metaphorical one of a 'very strong link' between two terms (already seen in a note previously cited in Notebook 4, § 33), which is further strengthened by the considerations presented here. This understanding of the concept of *bloc* reappears, in June 1932, in Notebook 9, § 39, when Gramsci speaks of 'certain economico-political and social blocs';[71] in the same way, in Notebook 10, II, § 48.II, from December, he states that 'man is to be understood as a historical block of purely individual and subjective elements and of mass and objective elements'.[72]

However, another note from Notebook 10 (§ 42.X (FS, 399–401)) appears to contradict this time pattern; in fact, in transcribing there (at a date that cannot be precisely determined, but which nevertheless was between August

71 The passage (logical and perhaps also chronological) between the 'strong' meaning of 'historical bloc', which appears until Notebook 8, § 240 (May 1932), and the 'weak' one, whose first occurrence is in Notebook 9, § 39 (June), is found in a letter to Tania dated 9 May, which again concerns Croce's *History of Europe*: if this 'can be written as the formation of a historical bloc, it cannot exclude the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, which are the "juridical-economic" premise of the entire European historical complex, the moment of force and struggle' (LP II, 170–3). Here the concept is again employed in the controversy with Croce, but already with a different meaning from that of *structure + superstructures*.

72 It will be recalled that this note contains what was described above as an ideal 'passing of the baton' between the 'quantity-quality' and 'objective-subjective' pairings as an alternative to 'structure-superstructure' (cf. above, § 3). In light of these consideration, it can be held that the concept of 'historical bloc' is developed in a manner more similar to the latter than to the former: in fact, this is also shown by its use during a phase in its 'weak' sense, followed by its 'philosophical' use, before it definitively disappeared from the *Notebooks*.

and the end of 1932) a text from Notebook 4, § 56, Gramsci again introduced the concept of 'historical bloc' in responding to this question: 'What relationship, which is not that of "implication in the unity of the spirit", will there exist between the politico-economic moment and other historical activities?' Nevertheless, the 'Crocean' context of the entire section, which relates it to the passages described above, the doubtful tone of the expression – 'is a speculative solution of these problems possible, or only a historical one, given the concept of "historical bloc" presupposed by Sorel?' – and the re-attributing of the category in question to French theory (regarding which Gramsci had previously raised a number of criticisms)[73] – which was never used again after the first mention of the topic – give this note an extemporaneous aspect compared to a line of thinking that was by then irreversible. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that, in the above-quoted text, the distinction between the economic ('structural') element and the political-ideological one ('superstructural') is no longer found within the term 'bloc'; instead, there is a distinction 'between the politico-economic moment and other historical activities'. Nevertheless, in the subsequent three-year period, 1933–5, the formula in question does not recur any more in the *Notebooks* in any of the meanings described here.

In light of this it can be concluded that, contrary to what has been held by those who consider the concept of the historical bloc as the 'fundamental nucleus of Gramsci's work',[74] this moment, though important, is not decisive in terms of the overall import of the prison reflections. More importantly, the concept is quite limited from a temporal standpoint: the conception of a more or less indistinct 'bloc' of economic, political and ideological elements does not constitute the last word from Gramsci on the genesis of historical events.

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73 See, e.g., Notebook 4, §§ 7, 31 and 44; Notebook 7, § 39; Notebook 8, § 21, etc.

74 Portelli 1973, p. XI; however, see *passim* (the cited expression represents the leitmotif of the entire volume, as testified to by its title). A substantially identical view can be found in Texier 1988, p. 12.

CHAPTER 5

The Gradual Transformation in Gramsci's Categories

1 Methodological Premise

The first part of this work has shown the evolution of several basic concepts in Gramsci's thinking during his prison reflections, identifying as a characterising feature of this process the gradual distancing from the schematism and dogmatism which was dominant at that time within international Marxism, the Soviet form in particular. The pages which follow shall attempt to determine if a similar diachronic interpretation can also be extended to all of the *Notebooks*, referring to two premises which, from a conceptual point of view, can be considered to be substantially independent from those analysed above: that of *centralism*, in its various meanings, and of *common sense* (and/or *good sense*). These latter concepts underwent a similar development to those previously examined, in particular: 1) a process of development that began (and was first 'set out') in 1930, underwent a period of crisis in 1931, and a 'turning point' in 1932, with further detailed treatment in subsequent years leading to increasingly more open and problematic formulations; and 2) the consequent difficulty Gramsci had in adapting the old notes from the 'special' notebooks to the innovations in the newly-drafted texts, and thus the 'backwardness' of the relative C texts with respect to the contemporary B texts, as evidenced by several small, and thus even more significant, 'warning lights' (in particular, the use of inverted commas).[1]

Therefore, the examination of the categories cited will be mainly 'formal' (not to say lexical, even graphical), as will also be the connection between these pages and the preceding ones. In fact, contrary to appearance, they do not represent a digression nor even a sudden change in topic, but instead are a necessary and reciprocal complement to the pages above, from which analogies will be drawn regarding certain points that are less clear and points

1 Ragazzini 1976, p. 17, has already emphasised the importance of what he (self)-ironically defined as the 'philology of inverted commas', maintaining that this 'introduces the analogical procedures of Gramsci' and analyses them, focussing on similar elements, even graphical ones, in addition to the apparently minimal or marginal variants.

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taken to be verified in the new texts and contexts. The concept of *civil society* provides the occasion for further analysis and examination of the peculiarities in the writings in the *Notebooks*; moreover, once again the theoretical-political topics dealt with above will be drawn on, and the topic of the relations between Gramsci and the Marxist tradition will be introduced, which will be the subject of the final chapter.

2 'Organic', 'Bureaucratic', 'Democratic Centralism'

The term *centralism* generally indicates the fundamental rules that regulated the internal life of communist parties throughout the world[2] up until their recent, near universal (self-)dissolution:[3] that is to say, the ban on organised factions and the need for the severest discipline, so that, to use Gramsci's words, 'every member of the party, no matter what position or office he might occupy, remains a member of the party and is subordinated to its leadership'.[4]

2 The formula 'democratic centralism' in truth 'was already commonly used in the first years of the 20th century in the German Social Democratic Party, indicating the need to ensure efficiency and authority to the leadership, thereby avoiding excessive criticism and making sure the militants were obedient to the leaders they themselves had chosen. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it never appears in Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), even if this work rigorously deals with this formula' (Donzelli, Introduction and Comment to Gramsci 1981, p. 210).

3 Referring only to events surrounding the Italian party, this organisational principle was said to have been 'surpassed' only in 1989, with the motivation that it had by then 'become reduced to a formal impediment to the existence of factions without succeeding any more, in the absence of a prompt redefinition of the various leadership levels and competecies these entailed, in impeding the advance of a confused assembly-ism, a fragmentation of the decisional centers and horizons', going so far as to even become a 'hindrance to the party' (Chiti 1989, p. 191; however, see *passim* the entire n. 1/2, 1989 of *Critica marxista*, entirely dedicated to the eighteenth Congress of the ICP). This negative opinion was widely confirmed during the nineteenth and final assembly of the ICP held the following year (on which see n. 1, 1990, of *Critica marxista*), which decreed its transformation into the SDP. Nevertheless, it must be observed that, beyond the terminological questions, already during the '80s it was clear that 'the entire history of the ICP was a continual evolution, a transformation of democratic centralism. There is nothing, or almost nothing which the democratic centralism of today has in common with that applied and experienced before the 8th Congress (1956)' (Gruppi 1986, p. 114), and thus even more so with 'Gramsci's conception of the party', defined as 'all-encompassing' (ibid., p. 113).

4 Notebook 3, § 43.

This rule was accepted and defended by Gramsci not only in the *Notebooks*[5] but also in his previous work as a journalist and in his political activity, going back to his youth.[6] Nevertheless, another constant aspect of his reflections on this topic is the twofold interpretation this principle is subject to, indicated by the adjectives 'democratic' and 'bureaucratic': 'When the party is progressive it functions "democratically" (democratic centralism); when the party is regressive it functions "bureaucratically" (bureaucratic centralism)'.[7]

Evident here is reference to the two antithetical conceptions regarding the leadership of the Italian CP, revealed above all in 1923–6 in the conflict between

5 See, e.g., Notebooks 6, §§ 11 and 79; 7, § 90; 12, § 2; 14, § 45, etc.

6 Already in a 'Sotto la Mole', 10 April 1916, Gramsci, referring to the expulsion of Guido Podrecca from the ISP for being an ardent supporter of the Libyan war, stated that the decision 'sudden and decisive, aroused no regrets nor echoes of pain', since the expelled 'no longer had the right to belong to the family of the Italian proletariat'. Extending his discourse he added: 'the decision is unappealable, honourable victims of socialist intransigence and Dominicanism', since 'one must be implacable against the exaggerators … when one wants to achieve a goal and bring to triumph a truth, it is necessary to isolate oneself and be intransigent and Dominican' (now in Gramsci 1980, pp. 248 ff.).

7 Notebook 14, § 31 (SPN, 155). To fully understand the meaning of the adjective 'democratic' in this context one must consider the following clarification made elsewhere by Gramsci: 'Party democracy is one thing and democracy in the state is another. To acquire democracy within the state it may be necessary – indeed, it is almost always necessary – to have a strongly centralised party; and furthermore, questions of democracy and oligarchy have a precise meaning which comes from the class difference between leaders and members … If there is no class difference [and this should always be the case in what for Gramsci is and must remain the party of the working class] the question becomes a purely technical one – the orchestra does not believe that the conductor is an oligarchic boss – concerning the division of labor and education, that is, centralization must take into account that in popular parties education and political "apprenticeship" take place mostly through the active participation of members in the intellectual – discussions – and organizational life of the parties. The solution to the problem, which becomes complicated precisely because intellectuals have a large function in advanced parties, can be found in the formation, between the leaders and the masses, of a middle stratum which is as large as possible and which can act as a balancing force to prevent the leaders from deviating during periods of deep crisis and to ensure they go on promoting the masses' (Notebook 2, § 75; even clearer is a text written before his incarceration, found today in Gramsci 1971, p. 75: 'our party is not a democratic party, at least in the vulgar sense commonly given to this word'). The comparison with 'the command of the orchestra conductor: agreement reached in advance, collaboration; command is a distinct function, not imposed hierarchically', opposed to 'corporalship', is taken up again in Notebook 8, § 45. In this regard, Gerratana states that 'the example of the command of the orchestra leader, as a necessary leadership function for a social organization, is already contained in Marx's *Capital*' (Q, 2875).

Gramsci and Bordiga. According to Gramsci, these reflect the 'Leninist criteria', to which he constantly referred, and the 'formalistic and substantially deviant interpretation', respectively, which Lenin's successors gave to the leadership of the Bolshevik party: the latter had made sure that 'no party would exist that had an autonomous, creative policy, which is automatically centralized'.[8] Thus, Gramsci is referring to this second type of organisational framework when, already in prison, he spoke of the party as 'a simple, unthinking executor. It is then technically a policing organism, and its name of "political party" is simply a metaphor of a mythological character'.[9]

Up until this point there is no room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. However, problems arise in characterising the third formula used in the *Notebooks*: 'organic centralism'. In fact, Bordiga also uses this to denote his vision of the party;[10] and this clearly is the focus (along with, though implicitly here and elsewhere, the theory and practice of centralism in the Stalinist Soviet Union and the Comintern after 1928) of Gramsci's criticism, which first appeared in Notebook 1, § 49, written between February and March 1930. It is no coincidence that, in insistently taking up again this political topic Gramsci

8 This quote is from Paggi 1984, pp. 193 ff. It is interesting to note that a similar opposition recurs in the contemporaneous writings of Trotsky: democratic centralism is the only organisation possible for a communist party, while bureaucratic centralism, which represents its Stalinist degeneration with respect to Leninist theory and practice (see, e.g., Trotsky 1963, pp. 504–7), is to be combatted along the same lines as 'bourgeois imperialism' (ibid., p. 438).

9 Notebook 14, § 31 (January 1933; SPN, 155). For the meaning of this reference to the 'police' see Notebook 2, § 150 (written in 1933, but after January), where Gramsci in fact asks: 'What is the police?', recalling that 'this question has been mentioned in other notes dealing with the real function of political parties' (and Gerratana, *Q*, 2574 refers in fact to the above-mentioned note). Clearly here he is alluding not only to 'that particular official organization which is juridically recognized and empowered to carry out the public function of public safety, as it is normally understood. This organism is the central and formally responsible nucleus of the "police", which is a much larger organization in which a large part of a state's population participates directly or indirectly through links that are more or less precise and limited, permanent or occasional, etc.' On his condemnation of 'bureaucratic centralism' see also Notebook 4, § 33; Notebook 8, § 55; Notebook 11, §§ 66 (FS, 449–60) and 67 (SPN, 418–19), which, nevertheless, do not include important modifications.

10 'The theory of an "organic" conception between party and class had been lucidly posited by Bordiga in a 1921 essay', where he spoke of an 'organizational formula corresponding to his view of the party as a class "organism"' (Donzelli, Introduction and Comment to Gramsci 1981, p. 211; see again Paggi 1984, pp. 193 ff. and the relative note 65 on p. 212; Gerratana, *Q*, 2842).

once again found himself fighting, even if only ideally, against his adversary in this last 'militant' phase of his life:

> The principle of 'organic centralism' is 'co-optation' around a 'possessor of the truth', someone 'enlightened by reason' who has discovered the 'natural' laws, etc. (The laws of mechanics and of mathematics function as an intellectual motor; the metaphor replaces historical thought), linked to Maurrasism.

The note immediately preceding this (§ 48) was dedicated to *Charles Maurras's reverse Jacobinism*;[11] in this note Gramsci wrote: 'The rigidified and rationalistic politics typified by Maurras, the politics of aprioristic abstensionism, of astral natural laws that govern society, are bound to end up in decay, in a collapse, in a surrender at the crucial moment'. These are thus, to Gramsci's thinking, the fundamental features of Bordiga's view of 'organic centralism'. In fact, as he explicitly wrote a few pages later, in § 53,

> many features of Maurras' views resemble some formal catastrophic theories of a certain kind of syndacalism or economism … Every political abstensionism is based on this concept (political abstensionism in general, not only parliamentary). The adversary's collapse will come about mechanically if he is boycotted intransigently in the governmental field (economic strike, political strike, or political inaction).[12]

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11 The italics are Gramsci's and indicate the section title.

12 Even if here Gramsci held that 'the classical Italian example is that of the clericals after 1870' and their abstentionism in deference to the papal *non expedit*, there is nonetheless a strong analogy with certain views of the first secretary of the ICP, or at least with the image he is portrayed with in the *Notebooks*. In Notebook 7, § 35 (February–November 1931) he criticised Bordiga for his 'narrow and stupid interpretation … an infantile assertion that does not even properly belong to positivist science', of 'Feuerbach's statement: "Man is what he eats"'; in Notebook 9, § 26 (May 1932) his '"economist" extremism' would be held to be equally unjustified (and 'never to be justified'), belonging to the 'culturalist opportunism' of the 'rightist' Tasca; in the contemporary Notebook 10, I, § 1 (FS, 332–4) his 'deleterious form of "Jacobinism"' would be compared, taking account of the difference in intellectual stature (to the detriment of Bordiga, naturally), to that of Croce. Subsequently his 'so-called Rome Theses' would be defined as 'a typical example of Byzantinism … in which a kind of mathematical method was applied to each issue, as in pure economics' (Notebook 9, § 63, from July–August 1932; SPN, 201), adding that to these could be juxtaposed 'Don Ferrante's mental form' (Notebook 14, § 25, from January 1933; FS, 303).

Another analogy, suggested by the subsequent § 54, is made to the strategy adopted by the English command in the Battle of Jutland: in fact, it '"organically" centralized the plan in the flagship: the other ships had to "wait for orders" evey time', with results falling short of expectations, so that 'at a certain point the admiral lost communication with the fighting units and they committed error upon error'.[13]

Several months later, in Notebook 3, § 56 (June–July 1930), the question of 'organic centralism' was taken up again at length, with the comparison now being to 'a caste and priestly type of leadership', which conceives of '"ideology" or doctrine as something artificial and mechanically superimposed', not 'as something historically produced, as a ceaseless struggle'. In fact, 'organic centralism imagines that it can forge an organism once and for all, something already objectively perfect. An illusion that can be disastrous because it would drown a movement in a quagmire of *personal* academic disputes'.[14] With respect to this note, nothing new is substantially added to the one shortly thereafter (Notebook 4, § 33; September–October 1930) – 'if the intellectual does not understand and does not feel, his relations with the people-masses are – or, are reduced to – purely bureaucratic, formal relations: the intellectuals become a caste or a priesthood (organic centralism)' – or to Notebook 6, § 128, (March–August 1931): 'Organic centralism, crudely imperious and "abstractly" conceived, is linked to a mechanical conception of history and of the movement, etc.' Thus, in this last note the 'etc.' appears to indicate, as in many other similar cases, the presence of a conception that had been accepted by Gramsci, and to which he concisely refers:[15] in this case, the identification between

13 To evaluate, together with the facts, the perspicuity of Gramsci's reference to Bordiga's leadership of the party, the following lines, taken from a document issued by him in May 1923, are significant: 'each group is directed by a *group leader*, who is the link between the group and other groups from the area, the local, federal and central leadership bodies, following a hierarchy … The members of a group *must not* know the members of other groups, other group leaders, or members of the sectional or federal EC [Executive Committees], and they must only have work relations with their fellow group members' (Bordiga 1962, p. 266). The link between the four notes cited so far from Notebook 1 (§§ 48, 49, 53 & 54) is confirmed by the fact they reappear, together with other texts, in two consecutive notes in Notebook 13, §§ 37 (FS, 92–4) and 38 (FS, 94): in the first, the two paragraphs relative to 'Maurrasism', and in the second those explicitly dedicated to 'organic centralism'.

14 The reference here to Bordiga is obvious; moreover, this has also been pointed out by Gerratana, *Q*, 2538 and 2842.

15 In light of what has been observed above regarding 'structure-superstructure', it should not be surprising that a text from Notebook 3 is found, in the ideal finished development of Gramsci's prison reflections, at least in the same place as in the subsequent Notebooks

'organic centralism' and 'bureaucratic centralism'. On the contrary, as with the definition of 'relations of force', the radical and definitive turning point – even if in this case only terminological – occurred during 1932: in Notebook 9, § 68, written between July and August and entitled *Machiavelli. Organic and Democratic Centralism*. Here, after several observations and references in particular to German social democracy, on

> the real economic and political relations that find their organizational form, their structuring and their functionality in the manifestations of organic centralism and democratic centralism in a series of fields: in the life of the state (unitary, federal states, etc.), interstate relations (alliances, various forms of international political groupings), the life of the political parties and the economic trade union associations (domestically or across countries, etc.),

again based on the opposition of the two concepts, Gramsci would finally arrive at the heart of the problem. He first proposes a distinction within the

> theories of organic centralism ranging from those that conceal a precise political program of true domination of one part over every other (whether this part is made up of one layer, for example, intellectuals, or a territorially privileged group) and those that represent a purely unilateral position (also pertaining to the intellectuals); that is, a sectarian situation, or one of fanaticism, and immediate in nature, which, though hiding a program of domination, is nevertheles less marked as a conscious political fact.

Subsequently he states that, in reality, for the latter, that is, for Bordigian 'organic centralism' (but also, and with increasing clarity, the Stalinist and Cominternist variety),

> the most appropriate name is bureaucratic centralism: organicity can only appertain to democratic centralism,[16] which, in fact, is a 'shifting

4 and 6. This in fact confirms, on the one hand, that the 'political' meditations in the miscellaneous notes precede the 'philosophical' meditations in the *Notes on Philosophy 1*, and on the other that, with respect to developments in the latter, 1931 does not reveal substantial progress.

16 Even in these words one can see the implicit controversy with Bordiga, who, at the Lyon congress 'openly declared that under certain conditions the Center can lead the party even

> centralism' so to speak; that is, a continual adaptation of the organization to the real historical movement; it is organic precisely in that it takes account of something relatively stable and permanent, or at least that moves in an easily predictable direction, etc. This element of stability … in parties takes the form of the organic development of the hegemonic social group … In parties that represent socially subaltern groups the element of stability represents the organic necessity to ensure hegemony not to privileged groups but to the progressive social forces … In any event, what is important to note is that where bureaucratic centralism exists, this is often due to a lack of initiative; that is, to political primitiveness [… while] democratic centralism is an elastic formula that lends itself to many 'incarnations'; it exists in that it is continually interpreted and adapted to necessity: it consists in the critical search for what is equal in the apparent dissimilarity and distinct and opposed in the apparent uniformity, and in organizing and closely linking that which is similar … It contains an organic unity of theory and practice, intellectual strata and the masses, governor and governed [… while] in the 'bureaucratic' conception … unity does not exist, only superficially calm and 'mute' stagnant swamps; not federations but sacks of potatoes, that is, mechanical juxtapositions of single 'unities' without any relation among them.

This lengthy quote serves because it unequivocally documents that, while the cornerstones of Gramsci's theories of the party and its organisation remained firm, at a certain point going forward this was no longer expressed in the contrast between 'bureaucratic centralism' ≈ 'organic centralism' *vs*. 'democratic centralism', but in that between 'bureaucratic centralism' *vs*. 'democratic centralism' ≈ 'organic centralism'. However, as noted above regarding the other 'turning points' in Gramsci's lexicon, rather than arriving suddenly and unexpectedly, this one represented the culmination of a long evolutionary process whose roots lay in the 'framework' of Notebook 4.

In fact, in § 33 of the latter, the 'bureaucratic' aspect of the relations between leaders and led, a characteristic then attributed to 'organic centralism', was opposed to the need for an 'organic attachment' among the two groups, at that moment generically termed 'historical bloc'.[17] Further on, in Notebook 6,

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against the majority will. Therefore, it would be better to replace the formula "democratic centralism" with that of "organic centralism"' (Ferri 1987, p. 77; see also Gerratana, *Q*, 2842).

17 For the meaning of this expression, see above, Chapter 4, § 4.

§ 84 (March 1931),[18] in discussing '"dilettantism and discipline" from the point of view of the organizational center of a grouping', Gramsci maintained the need

> for 'continuity' that tends to create a 'tradition' – not in the passive sense of the term, obviously, but in an active sense, as continuity in constant development, but 'organic development'. This problem contains in a nutshell the entire 'juridical problem', that is to say, the problem of assimilating the whole grouping to its most advanced fraction; it is a problem of education of the masses, of their 'adaptation' according to the exigencies of the end pursued … [Nevertheless] the 'juridical' continuity of the organizing center must not be of the Byzantine-Napoleonic type (that is, a code conceived as permanent) but of the Roman-Anglo-Saxon kind, whose essential characteristic consists in its method, which is realistic, always in touch with concrete life in perpetual development.

In a word, as Gramsci explained immediately after, of the 'organic' type. The 'transitional' nature of the passage is confirmed by its conclusion: 'There exists, to be sure, the danger of becoming "bureaucratized", but every organic continuity presents this danger, which must be watched'. Clearly at this point *organicity* has not completely been separated from *bureaucratism* and become identified with *democraticness*, since here it is invoked only as the 'lesser evil' to disorganisation.

A step forward with respect to the results arrived at in this note is represented by the subsequent § 97:

> If it is true that every party is the party of a particular class, then the leader must build on this and develop a general staff and entire hierarchy; if the leader is of 'charismatic' origin he must repudiate his origin and work to make the function of leadeship *organic* – *organic* and with the characteristics of permanence and continuity.

18 Regarding the date of § 84 (which belongs to a group of notes Francioni places between March and August 1931), it can be noted that in the subsequent § 85 Gramsci's reasoning on the *Divine Comedy* in terms of 'structure' and 'poetry' brings to mind that part of his notes on Dante in Notebook 4, §§ 78–84, written before 13 March 1931 (for a more detailed examination of these, see above, Part 2, Chapter 4, § 2). It would thus seem plausible to date to March 1931 not only § 85 but (also in view of what was noted above, in note 35 to Part 1, Chapter 3) the entire group comprising §§ 75–85 as well.

This can only occur when 'the leader does not regard the human masses as a servile instrument – useful to attain one's own aims and then to be discarded – but aims, instead, to achieve *organic* political results (of which these masses are the necessary historical protagonists)'; otherwise there exists only a 'particular form of demagogy that culminates in Caesarism and Bonapartism with its plebiscitary regime'.[19]

It is now March 1932, and in Notebook 8, § 213.1 Gramsci writes: 'The efforts of cultural movements "to go to the people" – the Popular Universities and the like – have always degenerated into forms of paternalism; moreover, they utterly lacked coherence in philosophical thought as well as in *organizational control*'.[20] The latter has, on the other hand, always represented 'the strength of religions, and especially of Catholicism', because 'they feel very strongly the need for the unity of the whole mass of believers and do their utmost to forestall the detachment of the upper echelons from the lower strata'. The validity of the Catholic hierarchical model is confirmed shortly thereafter in Notebook 9, § 101 (written between May and June), in which Gramsci recognises the papacy's efficiency in its 'practical organization characterized by the *centralization of the ecclesiastical organism*';[21] it is clear at this point that the only thing missing is the formal sanction of a 'turning point' in the events that have already occurred, which would arrive shortly thereafter (between July and August) in Notebook 9, § 68.

In order to understand the reasons for this terminological innovation it is useful to consider more generally the use in the *Notebooks* of the adjective 'organic' and of other terms deriving from and/or semantically associated with 'organism', such as 'organically', 'organicity' etc., even the typically Gramscian '*organare*' (to organise), '*organato*' (organised) and '*organica*' (command structure), the latter signifying 'science of political organisation' (Notebook 13, § 2; SPN, 175–7, see also note 76 on p. 175). Generally their connotation is positive (or at least neutral, as in the case of 'organic crisis', which recurs an endless number of times, beginning with Notebook 3, § 11), at least after a brief period

19 Italics added; regarding these last two concepts as well as their connection with the concept of 'charismatic leader', see below, Chapter 6, § 1. For the dating of this note, even recognising that its 'logical distance' from § 84 (which has been assumed above to have been written in March 1931) implies an equal chronological distance – the more so as it was a period during which Gramsci's work, and with this the development of his thinking, was proceeding quite slowly compared to 1930 or 1932 – it is not possible to determine a more precise timeline than March–August 1931.

20 Italics added.

21 Italics added.

of initial uncertainty in which even negative overtones appear, though less frequently compared to the others. In fact, in Notebook 1, § 61 (February–March 1930) Gramci speaks of 'organic "lazzaronism"' and in Notebook 3, § 47 (June–July) of Comte's '"organic concepts"' (Gramsci's aversion to positivism is too well known to doubt the negative connotation of this reference). Finally, in the nearly contemporary Notebook 4, § 10 he states his wish not 'to compile an organic repertory of political maxima, but rather to write a book that is, in a certain sense, "dramatic"', thereby creating a new opposition between these two attributes, which, moreover, would not be taken up again in the second draft of the text (Notebook 13, § 21). To these examples must be added the uses of 'organic centralism' in the pejorative sense seen above, which thus, until that moment, did not represent the only such example.

Beginning in the second half of 1930 this latter use would, on the contrary, be isolated in hundreds of contexts where the adjective *organic*, or its related forms, always appears with positive connotations. The fact is that as Gramsci proceeded in his work he tended to assign increasing importance to *organicity*, which must be searched for everywhere, in the relations between intellectuals and the people (thus the famous and controversial figure of the 'organic intellectual'), as well as within an ideology or a political project, in one's own studies, and so on;[22] and, of course, in the party as well, as far as the relations between

22 Apparently possessed of a different opinion is Ciliberto 1989, pp. 679–99. In his view, with respect to the pre-incarceration writings, 'the *Notebooks* reveal a change in the vital lexicon', even while it continues to play a very important role; in fact, this includes the 'discipline-sponaneity', 'necessity-liberty', 'order-will' nexuses. Sbarberi 1986 emphasised that 'for ordinovist Gramsci the adjective "organic" signifies a homogeneous system of economic and social relations which is constantly outside of the conflictual logic of politics, and whose function and validity remain unvaried over time. In fact, among the most frequent synonyms of 'organic' are adjectives such as "absolute", "inevitable", "necessary"; among the antonyms are "private", "voluntary", "contractualist"' (p. 36). He then observes 'the re-emergence – even in the prison writings – of organicistic appeals that draw on descriptions of the guidelines for future cities. In the meantime, it should immediately be underlined that in the *Notebooks* the adjective "organic" has two unique meanings: 1) as a synonym for *structural, permanent, necessary* [what Sbarberi calls 'descriptive use']; 2) as a synonym for *socially integrated and regulated*' ('prescriptive use'), which contains the expressions 'democratic and organic centralism'. Finally, 'it is necessary to add that many conceptualisations in the *Notebooks* indicate in turn an "organicistic-type" symptomatology' (ibid., pp. 77 ff.), which in turn reveals a totalitarian political conception, even though one that is different from Stalin's (pp. 80–2). An entirely different interpretation is instead found in the later essays by Giuseppe Vacca, which insist on the democratic nature of Gramsci's concept of interdependence.

leaders and led are concerned. This is the reason that, starting at a point in time previously identified, Gramsci has his 'turning point', ending up by attributing a positive meaning to that 'organic centralism' he at first so strongly opposed as a formula of Bordiga's; nevertheless, the recent memory of this made the recovery of the term more difficult and tardy, unlike other cases where such changes were more rapid and premature. Thus, after having complained up until Notebook 1, § 116 of 'the absence of centralized and organized parties' in Italy, in Notebook 4, § 33 Gramsci once again combats 'organic centralism' while expressing already the hope for an 'organic attachment' between leaders and led; similarly, shortly thereafter in § 66 he emphasises the need for the will 'to centralize itself organizationally and politically'; however, with reference to 'centralism' the adjective 'organic' again continues to be synonymous with 'bureaucratic'.

On the contrary, once the change in direction is undertaken in Notebook 9, § 68 – starting from which the *true* 'organic centralism' would become 'democratic centralism' – Gramsci would go on shortly thereafter (November 1932) in Notebook 9, § 112 (taken up again without notable changes in Notebook 13, § 29 (SPN, 202–4), which is quoted here) to accuse his former political adversary Bordiga for the fact that 'his interest in the trade unions was extremely superficial, and polemical in origin – not systematic, not organic and coherent, not directed towards social homogeneity but paternalistic and formalistic', thus placing in opposition adjectives which previously had been closely related.

At this point it is necessary to deal with how this conceptual about-turn was reflected in the subsequent work on the *Notebooks*, with particular attention to the second drafting of the previously-cited passages. In fact, similarities can be found with the analysis of other theoretical-political concepts. In effect, both Notebook 11, § 67 (SPN, 418–19, which draws on Notebook 4, § 33) and Notebook 13, § 38 (FS, 94, composed of the union of §§ 49 and 54 from Notebook 1) do not substantially vary with respect to the original writings (as often occurred relatively late in the C texts),[23] in which 'organic centralism' had a pejorative meaning and was more or less explicitly equated to that of 'bureaucratic centralism', unlike the meanings presented in Notebook 13, § 36 (SPN, 185–90), which draws on Notebook 9, § 68. The contrast between the two opposite meanings is even more evident due to the extreme closeness

23 In fact, the texts in Notebook 11 that include §§ 33 to 70 are dated between August and December 1932; § 38 of Notebook 13 is the third-to-last in a series of notes that end before Gramsci's departure from Turi (19 November 1933).

of the two C texts in Notebook 13.[24] Thus, by keeping in mind the different dates when the passages were written from which the latter derived (spring 1930 and summer 1932, respectively), as well as the addition of the expression 'so-called' to the formula 'organic centralism' in the synonymous meaning of 'bureaucratic' – small but significant details – it is possible to affirm the absence of any incongruity as well as to reconstruct the evolution of Gramsci's thinking.

A confirmation of the irreversibility of this along with the other 'turning points' in the *Notebooks* is again revealed by an analysis of the later B texts on the topic, starting from Notebook 14, § 34 (January 1933; SPN, 155), from which the quote discussed at the start of this section on the opposition between 'bureaucratic centralism'-'democratic centralism' was taken. In fact, in the subsequent § 38.11 (January–February) the terms 'national and bureaucratic centralism' characterise the tendency toward the 'centralisation' of forces which, 'though relatively considerable, are not homogeneous and permanently systematic, but of the "bureaucratic" type'.

In § 45 (February), entitled *Past and Present. Organic Centralism and Democratic Centralism. Discipline*, Gramsci wrote that 'discipline … does not cancel the personality in an organic sense but only limits arbitrary acts and irresponsible impulsiveness', at least when 'the origin of the power that orders the discipline … is "democratic"; that is, if the authority is a specialized technical function and not an "arbitrary act" or an extrinsic or external imposition', so that the discipline itself ends up constituting 'a necessary element to the democratic order, to liberty'.

In the contemporary § 59 (CW, 404–5), Gramsci wrote, once again returning to what he defined in many other similar notes as 'type of periodicals',

> One can obviously remark that the enterprises existing up till now have become *bureaucratized*, they have failed to stimulate needs and *organize* ways of satisfying them … The truth in the latter case was that there was neither 'initiative' nor '*organization*' but merely *bureaucracy* and a fatalistic fad.[25]

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24 Clearly, in order to make this contradiction (which is only apparent, as will be shown immediately below) less obvious, the editors of the first edition of the *Notebooks* placed these two texts in the book of *Notes on Machiavelli* at a certain distance from one another (pp. 74–7, 113 and 220); the same holds even more for Notebook 11, § 67, which is included in another book, that on *Historical Materialism* (pp. 114 ff.).

25 The added italics underscore that in Gramsci's text the 'organic'-'bureaucratic' opposition is also reflected in the respective semantic fields.

In Notebook 15, § 40 (May; FS, 105–6) the superiority of Catholic Action in France with respect to Italy and other countries was not due solely to its greater 'intellectual influence' on the people but also the fact it was 'better centralised and organised'.

In Notebook 17, § 22 (September–November; SPN, 372–3) the difference between the 'Anglo-Saxon countries, where religion is closely bound up with everyday cultural life', and the 'Catholic countries' was that, in the latter religion was 'bureaucratically centralised'.[26]

Notebook 15, § 13 (April 1933) appears to contradict the above-quoted texts, as in the former Gramsci rejects

> Every form of so-called 'organic centralism', which is based on the assumption … that the relationship between the governors and the governed is that the governors act in the interest of the governed and 'must' have their consent; that is, there must be an identification of the individual with the whole, the whole (of whatever type of organism) being represented by its leaders.

Nevertheless, specifying 'so-called' and placing *organic centralism* in inverted commas reveals that in this case Gramsci, as noted elsewhere, starting with the dialectic between structure and superstructure, consciously used outdated formulas, almost as if he wanted to combat his theoretical adversaries using their own weapons.[27]

Annotation

An electronic examination of the occurrences of the adjective *organic* and the related phrases in the *Notebooks* reveals a total of around 400 uses; that

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26 This note does not necessarily contradict those in which the 'centralisation' of the Catholic ecclesiastical body is valued positively and, moreover, used as an example. In fact, these represent two different ways of viewing the question, which are not mutually exclusive. If Gramsci in several places can appreciate the solidity of the Vatican centralist organisation, he nevertheless cannot avoid condemning its dogmatism and the consequences on the mass of faithful, contrasting it with the most 'liberal' Protestant churches.

27 It should also be kept in mind that this last passage can be considered, because of the connection it establishes between 'organic centralism' and the 'deterministic conception of history', not the rewriting (which formally speaking it is not) but certainly the return to and development of Notebook 6, § 128, which contained a similar reference. This perhaps explains the presence in a B text of a style of writing, the use of inverted commas, that Gramsci normally adopted in the C texts.

is, on average one every six pages in the printed edition. Excluded from the examination were the nouns *organic* and *organism*, as well as expressions such as 'organic malady' (e.g., Notebook 6, § 201) and similar expressions, since these are outside the field of investigation. However, to this number should be added ten or so negative forms (for example, 'inorganic', 'disorganic'), as well as the verb *to organise* and its derivatives, when these are related to *organic*; that is, synonyms of the above-mentioned *organicise* and similar words, given that in Notebook 1, § 149, for example, Gramsci wrote that 'German emigration was organic, that is, industrial organizers emigrated together with the working masses'. However, for the sake of simplicity and brevity, all these meanings have not been considered here.

Nevertheless, the mere number of uses does not adequately express the distribution of this family of terms in the prison writings, which is not at all homogeneous. Only considering the first part of the *Notebooks*, there are only one and five occurrences, respectively, in the miscellaneous Notebooks 2 and 5, 14 in Notebook 3, 22 in Notebook 1 and 26 in Notebook 6 (clearly in relation to the large presence of political notes in this Notebook), 29 in Notebook 4 (one every four pages), 12 in Notebook 7, 31 in Notebook 8 (the latter three Notebooks contain the three series of *Notes on Philosophy*), and 34 (one every three pages) in Notebook 9 (dedicated in large part to the Risorgimento). In the second part of the prison reflections the occurrences tend to further increase, reaching 32 and 51, respectively, in Notebooks 12 and 13 (in total, one less than every two pages). The C text of the subseqent 'special' Notebooks, in addition to re-presenting almost all the forms of the A texts, often adds various others, while the occurrences remain quite high in the last miscellaneous Notebooks 14, 15 and 17 (on average one every five or six pages) and in the 'special' Notebook 29, composed entirely of B texts (one every three).

Another characteristic of the adjective *organic* and others similar to it is their concentrated use within a single note as well as in consecutive notes, and, more importantly, in various contexts, at times alternating with dozens of pages where these forms are completely absent, almost as if Gramci had alternating moments of affection and disaffection with them, thereby reproducing on a larger scale the swings in judgement regarding the 'organicity' of 'centralism' examined above. The first 'explosion' in this semantic group occurred again in Notebook 1, §§ 43–4; in fact, the first text presents the expressions 'organic form', 'organic diffusion', 'organic picture', 'organic relationship', 'organic countryside', 'organic expression' (the intellectuals were supposed to be the organic expression of the 'ruling classes'. This in a nutshell is the concept of 'organic intellectual'). The second text speaks of 'the intellectuals in an organic sense', referring to them as the 'organic vanguard of the upper classes' (missing now

from the famous formula is only the name), 'organic condensation', 'organic programme of government'. To underscore again the importance of these two sections, one must consider that before these there were only two occurrences of such terminology: in § 15, 'organic function'; and in § 38, in which, moreover, the adverb 'organically', a between-the-lines variant of 'officially', was probably added by Gramsci after the writing of the note. On the contrary, §§ 43–4 followed shortly after §§ 49 and 54 in the same Notebook 1, in which for the first time the definition of 'organic centralism' was treated.

Also quite significant is Notebook 4, § 49, where we read that 'every social group … creates together with itself, organically, a rank of several ranks of intellectuals'; however, alongside the six occurrences of 'organic intellectual' one also finds: 'organic general staff', 'organic category' (twice), 'organic development', 'organic books' and 'organic distribution'. In the second draft of Notebook 12, § 1 (SPN, 5–33) other expressions were added: 'organic intellectuals' (three new occurrences), 'organic development' (twice), 'organically bound', 'organic quality of the various intellectual strata', 'organic crisis', 'organic aspects', 'organic cooperation', 'organic conditions of work'. Moreover, in the same section that draws on Notebook 4, § 50 there is, from the beginning, 'conceived and structured [*organata*] phase', 'organic data', 'organic function'.

However, if in these texts such an abundant use of *organic* and the like is to be placed in relation with the topic in discussion (that is, the figure of the 'organic intellectual'), even more striking is the example in Notebook 6, § 106 where, in little more than a page dedicated to '*Journalism. News editor*', there are seven occurrences of the adjective in question, in contexts and with meanings extremely different from one another: in particular, 'organic type … of news editing' (twice), 'organic articles' (twice), 'organic life of a big city', '[organic] studies', '[organic] division of labor'.

Also of interest is the succession of notes, one after the other; for example, in Notebook 8, §§ 129–32, where one finds: 'organic … process', 'organic complement', 'organic … worldview', 'organic terrain of economic life'; or Notebook 9, §§ 67–9: in the first (SPN, 201–2) Gramsci speaks of 'organic attempts' and in the third, after many occurrences in § 68, of actions undertaken 'organically'. There are also an endless number of pairs of notes in which the terms in question return in the most varied of contexts, as if with regard to a phenomenon of mutual 'attraction' (which could perhaps offer a clue for further clarity regarding the dates certain notes were written, if one assumes they were written over a continuous period of time). Thus, one finds 'organic relations' and 'organic identification' (Notebook 8, §§ 141–2); 'organic crisis' and 'organically predisposed' (Notebook 9, §§ 61, FS, 268–9; and 62); 'developed … more organically' and 'organic … forms' (Notebook 15, §§ 44–5; FS, 245–6 and 176). Emblematic in

this regard is Notebook 15, §§ 66–7: both parts present the form 'organic continuity', but in one case this deals with that existing within the 'intellectual leadership class', while in the other it serves to characterise the 'agricultural firm'. Finally, in Notebook 29, §§ 2 and 3 (written in April 1935; CW 180–2 and 183–4), Gramsci writes that there exists only one language '[that is to] become in an "organic" and "totalitarian" way, the "common" language of a nation in competition and conflict with other "phases" and types … inorganic and incoherent' (these last expressions recur twice). Thus Gramsci asks 'if (and where) there is a spontaneous centre of diffusion from above, i.e. in a relatively organic, continuous and efficient form'.

3 'Common Sense' and/or 'Good Sense'

With respect to the terms analysed in the preceding section, *common sense* and *good sense* present a very complex development for two main reasons, one internal and the other external to the *Notebooks*: 1) their much greater use in the prison writings;[28] 2) the fact both are of common usage and have a far from univocal meaning in the common language (thus it is not only an easy play on words to say that the definition of these two concepts falls within the field of … common sense or good sense). This is even more so considering that, as mentioned above, 'around 1930, when Gramci began to write his notes, a new phase in the debate on the notion of common sense,

28 Here, too, a quantitative analysis of occurrences was done, which revealed that over 70 notes are involved, equally divided between A, B and C texts and covering all of the prison reflections, from the plan of Notebook 1 (February 1929) to Notebook 28, § 11 (probably written in early 1935). Nevertheless, in the case of *common sense* and/or *good sense*, the distribution of occurrences is not uniform over time. There are a couple before February 1930, a dozen or so in 1933, and the remaining in 1934–5 (almost exclusively second drafts of previous texts, but at times with additions worthy of attention). Completely absent only in some of the 'special', notebooks, such occurrences (such as those of *organic* and the like) tend to be concentrated, so that Notebook 8 alone accounts for around one-fifth of all occurrences. Overall, there is thus a similar tendency to that of many other concepts in the *Notebooks*: an initial 'explosion' in 1930, a pause in 1931, a strong (in this case, very strong) return in 1932, a constant usage again in 1933 (on 23 August of that year Gramsci asked Tania to send him 'this small book: Santino Caramella, *Il senso comune. Teoria e pratica* [Common sense: Theory and practice]': LP II, 319; see Notebook 15, § 65 (June–July), which contains the same bibliographical note, and Gerratana, *Q*, 2955), and subsequently a rearrangement of the material already gathered together, with the introduct a few (and for this reason significant) variations.

on the relation between philosophy and common sense, was underway mainly in Italy, though not only in Italy', stimulated also by the fact that 'in 1929 Febvre and Bloch had begun publication of the *Annales*. And one of their resolutions was knowledge of the forms of popular awareness regarding relations with the dominant culture'.[29]

For this reason as well it is necessary to examine the two terms only from a formal point of view, leaving out the important connections it is possible to establish between these and other Gramscian categories ('folklore', 'philosophy', 'culture', 'religion', 'intellectuals', 'people', etc.), which, moreover, have already been treated in numerous and detailed studies.[30] Two questions will be examined in particular here which are closely linked: the meaning of the two expressions in the many texts they appear in and their mutual relation to identity-alterity, which has been highlighted from the start of this section.

In fact, most authors who have dealt with the topic hold that the *Notebooks* contain a 'difference between common sense and "good sense": the latter is understood by Gramsci as a positive attitude which, at an immediate level, serves as an indication and critical element with respect to the crystallized and dogmatic nature of common sense. The term indicates the presence of a healthy core within common sense'.[31] Others instead have maintained that Gramsci 'does not consider the notion of "good sense"; or rather, he likens it to common sense. In reality, several uncertainties appear in Gramsci on this point; good sense is understood at times as an aspect of common sense, at times as an updated common sense'.[32] The pages below seek to show that this is not a case of continuous, incoherent waverings but of an evolution, though not always linear, from the first meaning to the second, and finally to a 'conception' that was evident at the start of 1932. Thus, this 'turning point' of Gramsci's will

29 Sobrero 1977, pp. 623 and 627.

30 See above all in this regard the essay by Cirese 1976, pp. 65–104, as well as the subsequent *Postille* [Annotations] on pp. 110–27 and 145–7; in the latter the author expresses regret that the critical edition of the *Notebooks* 'came out too soon for him to ignore its presence, but at the same time too late to deal systematically with that critical re-examination of *his* observations which the new text and new information made necessary'. For a recent treatment of the question, which makes maximum use of the possibilities presented by Gerratana's edition, see Frosini 2003, pp. 168–82; Liguori 2006, pp. 69–88; and Francioni and Frosini, 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 27', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 18, pp. 272–7.

31 Carpineti 1977, p. 338; for his part, Cerroni 1977, p. 139, identified a 'problematic scale' with respect to *senso comune – buon senso – filosofia critica*, while Ragazzini 1976, pp. 188 ff., speaks decidedly of a 'contradiction between the stated vision of the world and that implicit in behavior, between common sense and good sense'.

32 Sobrero 1977, p. 642.

also be explained by first documenting its intermediate stages, which preceded and prepared the way for it, and then the consequences of the subsequent transcriptions of the A texts in the 'special' notebooks and the contemporary writing of the new B texts. However, consideration will also be given to the fact that 'a battle of quotations would be misleading since it would be schematic and not synthetic and dialectic; instead, an overall examination of the texts is necessary, as part of Gramsci's rigorous and open reflections'.[33]

Similarly to almost all the concepts in the *Notebooks*, that of *common sense* was used several times before being defined (as the others were) in February–March 1930. 'Common sense' is in fact mentioned with an explicit cross-reference to 'the concept of folklore', which was already in the list of 'Main topics' dated 8 February 1929, at the beginning of Notebook 1. Shortly thereafter, in § 16 of the same notebook (July–October), Gramsci observed that the 'readers' postcards' from the *'Domenica del Corriere'*, 'are one of the most typical documents of Italian popular common sense'; and in § 43 (December 1929–February 1930) he stated that 'the ability of the professional intellectual … is a "speciality"; it is not endowed by "common sense"'. It can be deduced from these indications that during this initial phase of the prison reflections the term *common sense* expressed in some way 'the average opinion',[34] which was decidedly opposed to the 'cultured' one and closer to that of 'folklore'.[35] The notion of 'good sense' was yet to be used.

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33 Ragazzini 1976, pp. 188 ff.

34 In fact, in Notebook 1, § 17, the '"Readers' Postcards" of the "Domenica del Corriere"' are defined as 'a model of the language spoken by the average Italian', as opposed to the 'literary or artistic language'; however, as Gramsci repeated several times 'language contains a certain conception of the world' (Notebook 11, § 12; SPN, 323–43; however, see also §§ 46–9; FS, 306–13 – collected under the title *The Translatability of Scientific and Philosophical Languages* – and Notebook 5, § 131; 10, II, § 44; SPN, 348–51; etc.).

35 The fact that in Italy at that time the average cultural level was not exactly between the highest level and that of popular tradition is testified to, among other things, by the fact that, as Gramsci would observe later on, 'the meaning of the term "middle class" changes from country to country and often leads to some very strange misunderstandings'; in Italy, unlike the more advanced countries (England and France), 'there is no concept of and no such thing as "upper class" (at least, not in common and political parlance); the term "middle class" naturally came to mean "petty and middle bourgeoisie". And, negatively, it came to mean "not the people" in the sense of "non-workers" and "non-peasants". Therefore, it also means "intellectuals". In fact, for many people 'middle class' refers precisely to the intellectual ranks, to cultured men (in the broad sense, and therefore it also includes white-collar workers [but primarily professional men])' (Notebook 5, § 119, recopied without significant variations in Notebook 26, *Questions of Culture* 2°, § 8). Only

In a passage further on that represented an initial definition of the question, Gramsci wrote (§ 65 (February–March 1930)):

> *Types of periodicals*:[36] Gozzi's *Osservatore* … Baretti's *Frusta letteraria* … Papini's *Lacerba* … This general type belongs to the sphere of 'good sense' or 'common sense'; it tries to modify the average opinion of a particular society, criticizing, suggesting, admonishing, modernizing, introducing new 'clichés'.

These publications 'must position themselves within the field of "common sense", distancing themselves from it just enough to permit a mocking smile, but not contempt or arrogant superiority'. The only novelty added to the notes until this point was the introduction of the expression *good sense*, used, moreover, exclusively as a synonym for *common sense*, in line with the current usage at that time.[37] However, in the continuation of the note Gramsci clarifies that:

> Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' which is ultimately the most widespread conception of life and morals. Every philosophical current leaves a sedimentation of 'common sense': this is the document of its historical reality. Common sense is not something rigid and static; rather, it changes continuously, enriched by scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered into common usage.[38] 'Common sense' is the folklore of 'philosophy' and stands midway between real 'folklore' (that is, as it is understood) and the philosophy, the science, the eco-

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with the subsequent broadening of the notion of 'common sense', which implies one exists for the cultivated classes as well, can this notion be said to be a *quid medium* between folklore and philosophy.

36 The italics indicate the section heading.

37 In the 1929 edition of the *Dizionario della lingua italiana* by Tommaseo (Tommaseo 1929, p. 729), a quote by Padre Cesari – 'He is nothing other that a bit of good sense, which he seems to have acquired by reading those good men' – is followed by this explanation: 'hence *Common Sense*, the faculty by which men judge things reasonably'. However, today the situation is not much different, given that 'common sense' is defined as 'the measure of, in terms of intelligence and judgement, the opinion of the vast majority (also, as a reflection of *common sense* in English, as a synonym for *good sense*)' (Devoto and Oli 2004, p. 2562), defined in turn as the 'individual's natural capacity to judge correctly, especially in view of practical necessity' (ivi, p. 396).

38 It is in this sense that the famous statement by Gramsci that 'every individual … is a philosopher' (Notebook 4, § 51, but see *passim*) does not contradict the recognition of the existence of a specialised category of 'professional philosophers'.

> nomics of the scholars. 'Common sense' creates the folklore of the future, which is a more or less rigidified phase of a certain time and place. (It will be necessary to establish these concepts firmly by thinking them through in depth).

'Common sense' or 'good sense' thus now appears as something broader in meaning and changeable, not yet 'philosophy' but no longer 'folklore' either, and differing according to the social classes of which it is an expression. Nevertheless, within such an expanded and, in a certain sense, non-judgemental meaning, it is possible to find a meaning that tends to debase *common sense* or *good sense*, likening it to 'widespread public opinion', along with one, in some ways antithetical, that views it as the opinion common to the upper classes, which is derived from 'high' culture and thus should be extended to the lower classes to elevate them intellectually. The three semantic meanings thus identified – which for convenience's sake will be denoted as 'neutral' [=], 'negative' [-] and 'positive' [+], respectively: the first intermediate between folklore and philosophy, the second closer to folklore, and the third to philosophy – reappear for about a year in almost identical form in the subsequent notes. These various meanings can be schematised as follows (while keeping in mind all the risks inherent in such an approach):[39]

'Neutral' meaning [=]: Notebook 1, § 79 (February–March 1930): 'in order to command, good sense alone does not suffice: the ability to command is, rather, the product of deep knowledge and extensive practice'. Notebook 3, § 49 (June–July): 'everyday experience in the light of "common sense", that is, the traditional popular conception of the world' cannot be in contradiction with 'modern theory', that is, historical materialism: 'there is, between the two, a "quantitative" difference – of degree not of quality; it should be possible to have a reciprocal "reduction", so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa. (Remember that I. Kant considered it important for his philosophical theories to be in agreement with common sense; the same is true of Croce. Remember Marx's assertion in *The Holy Family* that the political formulas of the French Revolution are reducible to the principles of classical German philo-

39 Clearly, at times attributing to an individual expression one or another of the three 'labels' mentioned above may not be immediately shared, because of the conciseness of the quotations included here as well as a different interpretation of the contexts surrounding them. Nevertheless, shifting the meaning of some of the uses of the terms in question does not change the substance of the problem, unless it can be demonstrated (which appears highly unlikely) that the two concepts are univocal in all the quoted notes.

sophy)'.[40] Notebook 4, § 62 (November) contains several 'traditional maxims that correspond to the common sense of the masses', taken from Xenophon and Pietro Colletta. Notebook 7, § 1 (contemporaneous): 'Croce is continuously flirting with the "common sense" and the "good sense" of the people (all Croce's pieces on the relation between philosophy and "common sense" need to be collected)'.

'Positive' meaning [+]: Notebook 4, § 18 (between May and August): the statement by Engels that 'the art of working with concepts is not something inborn … it is, rather, a technical labor of thought that has a long history' contains an aspect which 'is not "singular" – in other words … it had already become common sense before Engels'.[41] Notebook 5, § 39 (October–November): Gramsci believes he can refute the 'skepticism' with 'the commonsense objection' that, in order to be coherent, 'the skeptic should do nothing else but live like a vegetable'.[42] Notebook 6, § 78 (March 1931):[43] 'The historical question' regarding the starting date for the Risorgimento 'is muddied by the intrusion of emotions and politics and by prejudices of every sort. It is really difficult to make common sense understand that an Italy of the kind that was formed in 1870 had never existed before and could never have existed. Common sense is led to believe that what exists today has always existed and that Italy has always existed as a unified nation but was suffocated by foreign powers, etc'.[44]

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40 According to Cirese 1976, p. 113, this note contains 'a substantial equivalence and interchangeability between *folklore* … and *common sense*' [-]. Nevertheless, it is hard to think that Gramsci considered historical materialism to be 'translatable' into what for him was 'an indigestible agglomeration of fragments of all the conceptions in the world and in life that have arisen throughout history' (Notebook 27, § 1; CW, 188–91), since 'translatability presupposes … a "basically" identical cultural expression, even if its language is historically different' (Notebook 11, § 47; FS, 307).

41 As confirmation of this extreme polysemicity (especially in this period) of the concept analysed here, consider that in the same note Gramsci also hopes that 'the technique of thinking … will correct the deformities of the modes of thinking of common sense [-]', 'i.e., of the philosophy of the man in the street [=]'.

42 In this case common sense not only is closer to philosophy than it is to folklore, but is even superior to the deficiencies of philosophy itself (in the quoted passage, 'skepticism is related to vulgar materialism and positivism'), since it is immune to its 'abstruseness' and 'nebulous abstractions' and as such more suitable to uncovering and ridiculing these.

43 For the reasons mentioned above, § 78 (see note 18) should be dated to March 1931, also due to the evident contrast between the treatment of the concept of *common sense* therein contained and that in the subsequent notes.

44 Assigning this meaning of 'common sense' a positive connotation [+] should not be

'Negative' meaning [-]: Notebook 3, § 47 (June–July 1931): 'socialist intellectuals and positivists of Lombroso's school … fell into a strange form of abstract "moralism" … concretely identical to the morals of the "people" or "common sense"'. Notebook 4, § 41 (October); as to the objectivity of the real, 'as far as common sense is concerned, the question does not even exist. But what is it that provides common sense with such certitude? It is essentially religion',[45] which, in fact, 'affirms the objectivity of the real in that this objectivity was created by God'. 'For common sense, it is "true" that the world stands still while the sun and the whole firmament turn around it'. Thus, 'historical materialism accepts this point of view [the objectivity of the real] and not that of common sense, which nevertheless is materially the same'. 'Plan' of Notebook 8 (November–December): 'Folklore and common sense'. Notebook 6, § 26 (December 1930): 'The importance of Pirandello' is that he 'tried to introduce into popular culture the "dialectic" of modern philosophy, in opposition to the Aristotelian-Catholic way of conceiving of the "objectivity of the real"', even though with 'the romantic quality of a paradoxical struggle against common sense and good sense'.[46] Notebook 7, § 29 (February 1931): 'The dialectic is something very arduous and difficult insofar as it goes against vulgar common sense that expresses itself through formal logic, is dogmatic, and eagerly seeks absolute certainties'. For this reason Bukharin's error was that 'he really capitulated before common sense and vulgar thought … The uneducated and crude environment has exercised control over the educator; vulgar common sense has imposed itself on science instead of the other way round'.[47]

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surprising: though criticised by Gramsci as an obstacle to the development of a more mature historiographical analysis of the topic, it is nevertheless still the common opinion of scholars, and not certainly of the common people (a necessary condition for the attribution of the [-] connotation), for whom the question does not even arise.

45 According to La Rocca 1981, p. 148, 'the key to initiating debate on the entire religious question in Gramsci is precisely to be found in the reflection on common sense'. Vice versa, the identification of a new element (religion) among the elements of common sense represents undoubted progress with respect to his previous thinking.

46 On Gramsci and his reading of Pirandello, see Stipčević 1981, pp. 89–145; Prost 1999, pp. 171–7.

47 It is interesting to note the consonance between this aspect of Gramsci's criticism of the *Manual* – taken up again in Notebook 11, § 22 (SPN, 431–6): 'The *Manual* contains no treatment of any kind of the dialectic … which is relegated from its position as a doctrine of knowledge and the very marrow of historiography and the science of politics, to the level of a sub-species of formal logic and elementary scholastics' – and the observations on Bukharin in Lenin's 'Testament' (and, more generally Lenin 1967), in which it is written

This group of notes is followed, for most of 1931, by a rather long phase in which the concepts of *common sense* and *good sense* no longer appear. In fact, they would reappear only in November in Notebook 8, §§ 173 and 175, in which, moreover, they were joined by the three meanings distinguished above. In § 173 common sense is first defined as 'the "philosophy of non-philosophers" – in other words, the conception of the world *acritically* absorbed from the various social environments in which the moral individuality of the average person is developed [=]'; and subsequently as the 'disjointed, incoherent, and inconsequential conception of the world that matches the character of the multitudes whose philosophy it is. [-] Historically, the formation of a homogeneous social group is accompanied by the development of a "homogeneous" – that is, systematic – philosophy, in opposition to common sense'. There follow several observations on the relation between Bukharin and common sense, and between the latter and religion, similar to those previously quoted, and thus not requiring treatment here. It is, however, useful to point out that Gramsci himself realised that '"common sense" has been criticised in two ways: (1) it has been placed at the base of philosophy [+]; and (2) it has been criticised from the point of view of another philosophy [-]. In reality, however, the result in each case has been to surmount one particular "common sense" in order to create another that is more compliant with the conception of the world by the leading group [=]'. He thus criticised 'Croce's judgment concerning "common sense"', in particular his 'taking pleasure in the fact that certain philosophical propositions are shared by common sense'; this, in fact, represents 'a disorderly aggregate of philosophical conceptions in which one can find whatever one likes [-]'. He ends the section with a quote by H. Gouhier on the unavoidable necessity, for the purpose of a 'spiritualisation', of 'l'effort par lequel l'esprit se débarasse du sens commun et de sa métaphysique spontanée [=]'.

Similar in tone are the observations in § 175: Gentile's statement that 'philosophy could be defined as a great effort by reflective thought to ascertain critically the truths of common sense and of naïve consciousness [=]' is criticised as 'another example of the disordered crudity of Gentile's thought. It is "naively" derived from some assertions by Croce'. Gramsci then quotes 'Giusti's [famous] epigram: "Good sense that was once the leading light / In our schools is now completely dead / Science, its little child / Killed it to see how it was made". [+] One should consider whether it was not necessary for science to kill tradi-

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that 'his [Bukharin's] theories can be considered fully Marxist with the strongest reservations, since these are infused with scholasticism, as he never learned dialectics'.

tional "good sense" [-] in order to create a new "good sense" [+]'. At this point it is logical for him to affirm that there does not exist 'just one, immutable, eternal "common sense". The phrase "common sense" is used in a variety of ways [=]; for example, by way of contrast to the abstruseness, the convolutions, and the obscurity of scientific and philosophical expositions [+]'. Finally, he maintains the need – already implicit in his view of Marx – for '"new popular beliefs", that is, for a new "common sense" and thus for a new culture, a new philosophy [=]'.

However, shortly thereafter, in Notebook 6, § 207 (January 1932), he writes again about the 'most backward and "isolated" strata of the population', who possess 'a specific kind of folklore, a particular type of "common sense" [-]'. Thus, he felt an increasingly urgent need to distinguish in some way between meanings that were so different and which, until then, he evidently had not dealt with thematically, given that even in the translations of Marx in Notebook 7 (during 1931) he translated as 'common sense' the original in German, *des bon sens*, *des gesunden Menschenverstandes*, rather than as 'good sense, healthy common sense'.[48] The spark was supplied by a page from Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*. In fact, in Notebook 8, § 19 (January–February 1932) Gramsci wrote:

> *Common sense*. Manzoni distinguishes between *common sense* and *good sense* … He mentions the fact that there were some people who did not believe the stories about the anointers but they could not say so publicly, for fear of going against widespread public opinion; then he adds: '… [G]ood sense was not lacking, but it stayed in hiding, in fear of common sense'.[49]

48 See Gramsci 2007, p. 805 and note 211; the expression is found in the famous passage on French materialism in the *Holy Family*.

49 In this regard Gerratana, *Q*, 2780–81, hypothesises either an indirect quotation or a re-interpretation of 'Manzoni's book, which was possessed perhaps by other detainees', since it is not among the books held by the Fondo Gramsci. This question is not particularly relevant for the present work, since this 'turning point' was already in the air and would have occurred even without a re-interpretation, direct or otherwise, of the passage from the *Promessi Sposi*. In fact, Gramsci had previously encountered a similar suggestion in an 'interesting … passage by Missiroli' which, among other things, distinguished 'the *common sense* of the students and the good sense of the … teachers' (Notebook 7, § 1, November 1930), evidently assuming a hierarchy of meanings of the two expressions. Yet he would continue to use them indifferently for over a year, beginning with the subsequent lines of the same note. More interesting instead is the suggestion

The italics (apart from the first one, which denotes as usual the section heading) evidently served to signal that the expressions 'common sense' and 'good sense' here had a different meaning to their previous uses and to common use; in particular, they are no longer synonymous. Subsequently, as will be shown below, Gramsci would place the two terms in inverted commas when they have this specific and independent role. The distinction was immediately adopted starting with the contemporary §§ 28 and 29 of the same notebook. In the former Gramsci affirms that

> in ordinary language, 'theorist' is used in a pejorative sense, like 'doctrinaire' or, better still, like 'abstractionist' ... It is no accident that certain words have acquired this pejorative connotation. It has to do with a reaction by common sense against certain cultural degenerations, etc. But 'common sense' in turn has been the agent of philistinism; it has mummified a justified reaction ... 'Good sense' has reacted, but 'common sense' has embalmed the reaction.

It appears in fact that there are three, not two, formulas used, each indicating only one of the meanings which are on several occasions distinguished: a wider meaning of *common sense* (without inverted commas) to denote the generic middle ground between folklore and philosophy [=] which, when the differentiation is not needed, is then alternated with or substituted for *good sense* (again without inverted commas). Within this vast category Gramsci often found it useful to point out the more precise concepts of '*good sense*' [+] and '*common sense*' [-], placing them mostly in inverted commas to indicate the particular semantic force he intended to assign them. This new 'arrangement' was immediately adopted, starting with the subsequent § 29:

> *Good sense and common sense*. The representatives of 'good sense' are 'the man in the street', the 'average Frenchman' who has become the 'common man', 'monsieur Tout-le-monde'. Bourgeois theater, in particular, is where one should look for representatives of good sense.

This is clearly a case of a broad meaning [=] of the term; in fact, in the heading it is understood as synonymous to *common sense*. The fact one of the three

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by Ragazzini 2002, p. 71, concerning a possible Engels-Labriola descendancy, in addition to a Manzonian one, regarding the opposition between good sense and common sense.

occurrences of *good sense* is in inverted commas can be explained as an oversight, due perhaps to a sort of power of 'attraction' exercised by all the other expressions in inverted commas in the short passage quoted.[50]

Gramsci behaves similarly in several notes in Notebook 8 (February–March 1932), beginning with § 204, where he intends to show

> that all men are philosophers, by defining the characteristics of this ['spontaneous'] philosophy that is 'everyone's', namely, common sense [=] and religion ... Religion, common sense [=], philosophy. Find out how these three intellectual orders are connected. Note that religion and common sense [=] do not coincide, but religion is a component of disjointed common sense [=]. There is not just one 'common sense' [=],[51] but it, too, is a product of history and a historical process. Philosophy is the critique of religion and of common sense [=], and it supersedes them. In this respect, philosophy coincides with 'good sense' [+] ... Science and religion-common sense [=].

In § 211 he then states that 'the philosophy of an epoch is not the philosophy of an individual or group. It is the ensemble of the philosophies of all individuals and groups [+ scientific opinion] + religion + common sense [=]'.

In § 213.111 Gramsci returns to the theme of

> *Philosophy and common sense or good sense* [=]. Perhaps it is useful to make a 'practical' distinction between philosophy and common sense [=]

50 However, it must be stated that similar considerations (to those made above regarding the evolution of other aspects of Gramsci's thinking) are not to be taken in an absolute sense but only to indicate, within the *Notebooks*, several tendencies destined to continually find exceptions, at times explainable in a plausible way (as in the case just examined), and other times attributable to the fact that 'Gramsci – due to personal aims and the terse nature of his writings – uses a large series of key words in the *Notebooks* that make up typical nomenclature, a sort of internal code ... to the point where several key terms are used as abbreviations for memos, cross-references and associations'. This explains how 'as [certain concepts] are one by one defined or redefined, or in any event become part of his theoretical knowledge, the inverted commas disappear', even if 'occasionally [they] return' (Ragazzini 1976, pp. 282 ff.).

51 In this case the inverted commas appear to carry out the same role of highlighting what is being written about, without referring to the above-mentioned codification. Compare, for example, Notebook 1, § 65, in which, time after time, they are used for 'folklore', 'common sense' and 'philosophy', according to which of the three terms is defined with the help of the other two, and which are thus not placed in inverted commas.

> …: Philosophy means, rather specifically, a conception of the world with salient individual traits. Common sense is the conception of the world that is most widespread among the popular masses in a historical period [=]. One wants to change common sense [=] and create a 'new common sense' [+].[52]

He states in § 215 that belief in the objectivity of the real had by then become 'a "commonsense" fact [-], even in those cases where religious feeling is dead or asleep.[53] Thus the use of this experience of common sense [=][54] as the basis for a destruction of the theories of idealism by ridicule has something rather "reactionary" about it – an implicit return to religious sentiment'.[55] The reason for this, as explained in § 217, is 'the "subjectivist" conception', that is, the fact that idealism 'has served the purpose of superseding transcendence on the one hand and "common sense" [-] on the other'.

It is for this reason that in § 220 Gramsci can maintain that 'a philosophy of praxis initially … must therefore present itself as a critique of "common sense" [-], but only after it has based itself on common sense [=] in order to show that "everyone" is a philosopher'. In fact, the history of philosophy 'can be considered as the history of the "high points" of the progress of "common sense" [=][56] – or,

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52 In this case the term is thus synonymous to *'good sense'* [+].

53 The [-] meaning of 'common sense' is explained here in relation to what Gramsci affirmed in Notebook 4, § 41, regarding the difference between the Marxist view on the objectivity of the real and the popular view, even though it is formally identical, since the latter derives in the end from religion. Regarding the entire question see Cospito 2008a, pp. 747–66.

54 In effect, in this case the expression 'experience of common sense' appears to allude to the philosophical use of the term, extraneous to the three considered here (which can also be viewed as three 'degrees' of the same 'quality'), used for the first time by Aristotle, then codified by the Scholastics and taken up again in the eighteenth century by Thomas Reid and the so-called 'common sense school', above all to demonstrate, in opposition to Berkeley and Hume, the immediate intuitiveness of the existence of external reality. However, what is important here is that this meaning clearly is not equivalent to the preceding *'common sense'* [-] derived from religion.

55 A similar example of 'a criticism of the "common sense"' of idealism is recalled in § 217: 'Tolstoy … recounts how he used to make himself dizzy, turning his head suddenly to find out if there had been a moment of "nothingness" before his "spirit created" reality'.

56 In this case the inverted commas represent an oversight (which, as will be shown below, was corrected in the second draft) owing probably to an 'attraction' exercised by the five expressions in inverted commas in the five lines immediately preceding that one and the eighteen that follow.

at least, of the common sense [=] of the most culturally refined strata of the society … The relation between "high" philosophy and common sense [=] is assured by politics'.

Similar examples could be drawn from texts from the subsequent months,[57] among which, for brevity's sake, mention will only be made of § 225 (April 1932): 'one reason for the spread of certain opinions of Croce's: Croce's activity was seen … as an activity that "integrated" good sense [=]'. In the almost immediate rewriting of this note in Notebook 10, I, § 4 (FS, 337–8) there is a long sentence in place of the just-quoted sentence, in which Croce's philosophy is first said to be self-conceived 'in common sense terms' and then 'of sound common sense', and, finally, identified 'with the attitude that sound common sense [=] has always adopted', thus confirming that, when not set out in inverted commas, the two expressions continue to remain basically synonymous for Gramsci.[58]

However, to understand how this new conceptual 'turning point' in the *Notebooks* was reflected in the second draft, the texts in Notebook 11, §§ 12–13 (SPN, 323–43 and 419–25) are particularly significant. These contain passages that precede and follow the moment when they have been inserted (January–February 1932), with the addition of entire sentences to the first draft, as often occurred during the initial phase of the work on the 'special' notebooks (the notes in question date to midway through 1932). A careful analysis of these thus avoids the precise quoting of all the successive recurrences of the A texts, except when they differ from the model represented by this paradigmatic example. § 12 opens with an extensive redrafting of Notebook 8, § 204, in which, among other things, Gramsci writes that 'the "spontaneous philosophy"' is contained in 'common sense and good sense', and not in 'common sense' alone, as occurred in the A text, thereby confirming the identification between the concepts taken in a broad sense [=]. On the other hand, philosophy understood as 'criticism and the superseding of religion and "common sense" [=] … coincides with "good" [+] as opposed to "common" sense' [-]. Slightly further on, in a newly added passage, he clarifies that 'this is the healthy nucleus that exists in "common sense" [=], the part of it which can be called "good sense"

57 See in particular Notebooks 8, § 216 (April 1932); 9, § 13; 10, I, § 7 (FS, 343–6) (April–May); 9, § 55 (June). In the latter text the term *'good sense'* is in inverted commas as in the citation by A. Oriani from which it is taken.

58 Similar considerations pertain to Notebook 10, II §§ 31, 33, 35 and 37.I (FS, 424–5; 428–30; SPN, 362–3; FS, 365–6), in which Croce's philosophy is indifferently compared to common sense and/or good sense [=]. § 40 (SPN, 368) can also be included in the same group of notes, written between June and August 1932, as it still deals with the objective existence of external reality, which once again has the wider meaning [=] of *common sense*.

[+][59] and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent'. No significant changes appeared in the rewriting of §§ 213 and 220 of Notebook 8,[60] which was followed by the consideration that 'any cultural movement … aims to replace common sense and old conceptions of the world in general', understood therefore in the widest sense possible [=].

In stark contrast with this way of proceeding is § 13 of Notebook 11, which contains two texts written before the 'arrangement' of the initial texts written in 1932: the above-quoted §§ 8 and 10 of Notebook 8 (from November of the previous year), which reproposed unchanged the various meanings of *common sense* and *good sense*, in which the use of inverted commas for the terms did not yet carry the meaning described above. This non-discrimination between the terms continued also in the long passages added to the C text. This apparently contradictory behaviour is fully in line with Gramsci's general approach in trascribing the old notes in the 'special' notebooks; when the terms are far from the concepts he had developed at that moment (as in this case, coming before the 'codification' of the new terminology) he decided not to introduce the changes he had arrived at in the meantime, engaging instead in what often was a mere mechanical recopying. It is true, however, that this time the change, only formal, would not have entailed great difficulties (unlike the case, for example, described in the first part of this book regarding the redrafting of Notebook 4, § 38 on the relation between structure and superstructure). Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that Gramsci's interest, with the distinction between the various meanings of *good sense* and *common sense* already established (and which had just been reaffirmed in Notebook 11, § 12, which immediately preceded the text in question here), was now directed at criticising the view of Bukharin, Croce and Gentile (who did not distinguish the terms) toward those concepts understood in a broad sense, as shown by the wide and interesting theoretical integrations with respect to the A texts (these are omitted here in order to focus on the specific problem at hand).

Similar considerations could be made for many of the other texts in Notebook 11, which in general take up again, without significant variations, those quoted above.[61] On the other hand, it is interesting to note that § 59 (February–

59 In this case the inverted commas are clearly replaced by the expression 'can be called'.

60 The sole but significant exception is the elimination of the inverted commas which, in note 56, had been explained as an oversight of Gramsci's.

61 Reference here is in particular to §§ 16 (SPN, 452–7; A text: Notebook 8, § 211); 17 (SPN, 440–6; A: Notebook 8, §§ 215 and 217); 22 (SPN, 431–6; A: Notebook 7, § 29); 37 (FS, 290–2; A: Notebook 4, § 40); 40 (FS, 295–7; A: Notebook 8, § 184) and 44 (FS, 298–303; A: Notebook 4, § 18). In § 21 (SPN, 457–8), on the other hand, with a modification with respect to the

May 1933; SPN, 345–6, one of the few that was redrafted),[62] again adopts the codification outlined above and several times ignored in those C texts that draw on earlier A texts. In fact, here Gramsci writes of

> a rational, not an arbitrary, will, which is realised in so far as it corresponds to objective historical necessities … [and] comes to be accepted by the many, and accepted permanently: that is, by becoming a culture, a form of 'good sense' [+], a conception of the world … It seems that the philosophy of praxis alone has been able to take philosophy a step forward … in that it assumes it in the form of a conception of the world and of 'good sense' [+] diffused among the many (a diffusion which precisely would be inconceivable without rationality or historicity) and diffused in such a way as to convert itself into an active norm of conduct.

A development entirely similar to that in Notebook 11 is found in the B and C texts in Notebook 10, II,[63] as well as in the single drafts of Notebooks 14, 15 and 17[64] compared to the rewritings of Notebooks 13, 16 and 24,[65] which, in order to avoid redundancy, will not be dealt with here.

A text (Notebook 7, § 5), where the topic is not dealt with, Gramsci speaks of 'the most arbitrary and bizarre theories which aimed to reconcile the Bible and Aristotle with the experimental observations of good sense', understood here as synonymous to 'common sense' in the technical-philosophical meaning used in note 54, to which the subsequent Notebooks 14, § 51; 15, § 4 (SPN, 144–7); 17, § 18.I and 28, § 11 can be traced back (and which thus will not be discussed here).

62 Of the 71 sections that compose Notebook 11, only seven are in fact B texts.

63 In fact, while § 41.I (FS, 403–4) reproduces the A text of Notebook 7, § 1 without changes, the B texts of §§ 44 (SPN, 348–51) and 48.I (SPN, 348) fall within the framework adopted here. In the former Gramsci wrote that 'language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense) [=] and therefore the fact of "language" is in reality a multiplicity of facts more or less organically coherent and co-ordinated'; in the latter '"common sense" or "good sense" [=] are equated'. If it is true that the two expressions are in inverted commas in the text, this depends on the phrase 'is normally termed' that precedes them, unlike what occurs in the continuation of the note, in which *common sense* [=] and *"common sense"* [-] are regularly alternated. The subsequent § 57 (FS, 189–90), which speaks of the 'common meaning of the word', and the similar use of the expression in Notebook 14, § 61 (CW, 124–5), will not be dealt with here.

64 See in particular Notebooks 14, §§ 37 and 45 (CW, 245–6); 15, §§ 13, 42 (CW, 236–7) and 65; 17, § 21.

65 Reference here is to Notebooks 13, §§ 20 (SPN, 133–6; A text: 4, § 8) 39 (A: 1, § 79); 16, §§ 9 (SPN, 388–99; A: 4, § 3), 12 (A: 8, § 216), 21 (CW, 380–5; A: 1, §§ 122 and 153) and 27 (A: 9, § 101); 24, *Giornalismo*, §§ 3 (CW, 412–19; A: 1, § 43) and 4 (CW, 419–21; A: 1, § 65). As

However, worthy of particular attention is one of the final occurrences of the concepts under examination here, which further supports the interpretation in this section. In § 1 of Notebook 27 (probably written at the beginning of 1935; CW, 188–91), in which Gramsci starts (and very soon thereafter ceases again) to gather together his *Observations on 'Folklore'*, there is a significant addition to the original text (Notebook 1, § 89) which aims to underscore 'the strict relationship between folklore and "common sense" [-], which is philosophical folklore'.

4 Civil Society

The interpretation of the concept of *civil society* has long been the object of debate, and thus is the starting point here for determining whether for this fundamental category of Gramscian thinking as well a diachronic interpretation is not only possible but also useful in contributing to eliminate doubts and ambiguities that otherwise could not be removed. The obligatory starting point here is the paper by Norberto Bobbio at the second convention on Gramsci studies (1967). Brought together on that occasion to exchange ideas (almost always controversial) were most of the authors who, starting with that convention, have continued until the present to deal with the question. In short, unlike Marx and Engels, Bobbio held that for Gramsci civil society 'is not a moment of the structure but of the superstructure', as in Hegel;[66] more precisely, the *Notebooks* present 'a secondary antithesis that develops in the sphere of the superstructure between the moment of the civil society and that of the state. Of these two terms, the first is always the positive moment, the second the negative one'.[67] As a result of this, Bobbio added that within the 'historical bloc … there are two dichotomous movements, the main one between structure and superstructure and the secondary one between the two superstructural moments of the institutions of consensus and the institutions of force; and that the boundary between these two movements is the civil society'.[68]

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mentioned several times above, it should also be kept in mind that there tend to be fewer variations (quantitatively and qualitatively) to the initial writings over time due to both the worsening health of Gramsci and the fact his remaining strength was dedicated to the writing of new notes, given the impossibility of adapting his old theoretical formulations from 1930–1 to his latest thinking.

66 Bobbio 1990, p. 48.

67 Ibid., p. 54.

68 Ibid., p. 67.

Jacques Texier and Valentino Gerratana were among those who immediately expressed 'profound disagreement with Bobbio's overall presentation',[69] in particular regarding two fundamental points which were closely linked: on the one hand, the relationship between Gramsci and Marx, and on the other the meaning of the expression *civil society* in Gramsci's work. As regards the first aspect, Texier's view is that 'Gramsci's originality resides not, in fact, at the point where he breaks with Marx and in his revision of historical materialism, but in the brilliant development' of Marx's theories, 'in particular, the development of the theory of the superstructures'.[70] For his part, Gerratana observed that 'while it is clear that the concept of civil society belongs [in Gramsci] to the moment of the superstructure, it is not equally certain that in Marx this concept is limited to the moment of the structure',[71] also recalling a passage from the *Jewish Question* (a book Gramsci read and translated a portion of in Notebook 7)[72] in which even religion was included in the sphere of 'civil society'.[73] Many other argumentations can be used to support this last thesis, among which it will suffice to note a passage from a letter written by Marx to Annenkov in 1846: 'If you assume a given state of development of man's productive faculties, you will have a corresponding form of commerce and consumption. If you assume given stages of development in production, commerce or consumption, you will have a corresponding form of social constitution, a corresponding organisation, whether of the family, of the estates or of the classes – in a word, a corresponding civil society';[74] that is to say, a corresponding 'superstructure'. Seen in this light, one has to share Hugues Portelli's view, according to which 'it thus appears that the interpretations' of Bobbio and his critics 'are radically opposed, but this contradiction derives from the interpretation of Marx rather than that of Gramsci'.[75]

The following pages do not aim at reconstructing the subsequent lengthy debate on this question[76] nor resolving it, but only at clarifying what Gram-

69 Texier 1969, p. 152 (argumentation developed and broadened in Texier 1968, pp. 71–99, and 1988).

70 Ibid., p. 153.

71 Gerratana 1969, p. 171.

72 See Gramsci 2007, pp. 794–9.

73 See Gerratana 1969, pp. 170–2.

74 Marx 1982, p. 96.

75 Portelli 1973, pp. 54–7.

76 For an overview up until the 1980s, see Francioni 1984, in particular note 104 on pp. 193 ff. (as well as pp. 189–200, which contain a convincing criticism of the above-quoted Anderson 1977); for subsequent developments, see Liguori 1996; also Liguori 2004, in particular pp. 225 ff.

sci means by *civil society*. In particular, it will be verified whether or not this concept belongs exclusively to the superstructural sphere, as Bobbio and Gerratana maintained (though for different reasons, and limiting themselves to the initial phase of the debate on the question), or if, as Texier stated: 'the concept of civil society in Gramsci takes on different meanings'.[77] In this last case, reason would lie with those holding that 'there is in reality, though with differing emphases, a co-presence of "structural" and "superstructural" elements in both Marx and Hegel's conception of civil society. And Gramsci only draws on this tradition'.[78]

In effect, an examination of the initial occurrences of the concept of *civil society* in the *Notebooks*[79] would appear to support Bobbio's view, in addition to confirming a similar development regarding the theoretical-political categories examined above. In fact, the first meaning of the term appears in Notebook 1, § 130, during the conceptual 'explosion' in February–March 1930. On that occasion Gramsci is speaking of (as the note heading indicates) the *Real Italy and Legal Italy*, that is, the 'formula contrived by the clericals after 1870 to direct attention to the national political uneasiness … Generally speaking, it is felicitous because there existed a clear distinction between the *state* (legality) and *civil society* (reality)'. Implicit here is a distinction between state and civil society that would appear in several texts in Notebook 3, §§ 90, 119 and 140, written in the summer of the same year. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Gramsci, almost as if to recognise the heterogeneity of this 'superstructural' meaning of the concept with respect to the prevailing one (even though, as shown above, not the only one) in Marx, emphasises it more by using inverted commas and/or underlining.[80]

The questions present quite a different aspect in a note which had been central to Gramsci's thinking even earlier. In Notebook 4, § 38, Gramsci, in contesting the doctrines of liberalism, observed that this 'speculates ignorantly (because of a theoretical error whose sophism is not hard to identify)', maintaining

> that economic activity belongs to civil society and that political society must not intervene in its regulation. But, in reality, the distinction is

77 Texier 1969, p. 156.

78 Donzelli, Introduction and Comment to Gramsci 1981, p. 117.

79 A complete list is found in Francioni 1984, pp. 189–200; Texier 1988, pp. 5–36.

80 To be precise, this occurs in 8 out of 12 cases in which *civil society* is used in the four passages quoted so far. See the discussion above on this approach by Gramsci with regard to *organic centralism* and *common sense* and/or *good sense* (see above, §§ 2–3).

> purely methodological and not organic; in concrete historical life, political society and civil society are a single entity.

It would be easy to conclude, as does Texier, that '"civil society" does not represent here one of the moments of the state in an integral sense', but bourgeois '"economic society" to the extent this is characterized by the exchange of goods. Clearly Gramsci opposes his conception of the relations between the economic world and the state to those of the theorists of free exchange … but against their views he puts forth his conception of the relation between the state and civil society *as a place of economic activities*':[81] in other words, his 'structural' meaning. However, the problem becomes further complicated as, again in Notebook 4, § 38, 'several lines after having adopted the expression "civil society" to indicate where economic activities take place, Gramsci uses the term to indicate the moment of the hegemonic struggle',[82] stating that, with respect to liberalism,

> the case of theoretical syndicalism is different because it has to do with a subaltern group that is prevented by this theory from ever becoming dominant: prevented, that is, from leaving behind the economic-corporate phase in order to advance to the phase of politico-intellectual hegemony in civil society and become dominant in political society.

At this point, Texier's conclusion is, all things considered, predictable: 'the *Notebooks* contain two main meanings … for the expression "civil society", one specifically Gramscian, which reoccurs continuously, the other – in the so-called Hegelian-Marxist tradition – where "civil society" is where economic activities take place … We have also seen that Gramsci moves from one meaning to the other in the same text or uses the terms with an uncertain meaning'.[83]

The many subsequent notes in which the term reappears do not entail significant changes; the various meanings described above continue to be reproposed, though with a rather marked prevalence for the 'superstructural' meaning. Here a precise quote will thus be omitted in order to formulate an overall view of the topic and propose an explanation of an approach by Gramsci apparently distinct from those examined previously: that is, the use of the

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81 Texier 1988, p. 9; in fact, the French critic refers to the second draft of the above-quoted text (Notebook 13, § 18), which, however, from this point of view is not substantially different from the first.

82 Ibid., p. 23.

83 Ibid., pp. 24–5. On the connection between civil society and hegemony, see above, Part 1, Chapter 2.

same concept to refer to disparate aspects, without a gradual affirmation of one meaning over the other throughout the *Notebooks*.[84]

It is certainly true that, as Texier stated, 'Gramsci, in line with his theory of the historical bloc, in which the ethico-political is the form of an economic-social content, should not have any difficulty in shifting from one meaning to the other of the expression "civil society"'.[85] However, it is also true that, as long as the distinction between 'form' and 'content' is, at least theoretically, admitted, there is no reason why Gramsci, having available a vast range of terms to express this distinction (in addition to the binomial 'content-form', the binomials 'structure-superstructure', 'quantity-quality' and 'subjective-objective'), should in this case not take this into account. Moreover, while Gerratana is not wrong in noting in this circumstance 'that type of substantial non-systematicness which is inherent in the development itself of his thinking and its characteristics of intrinsic coherence',[86] it should nevertheless not be forgotten that this 'flexibility' *never* goes so far as to entail the co-presence of opposing meanings for the same term, *at least as regards the fundamental concepts of the 'Notebooks'*, in which any ambiguity, when present, is sooner or later resolved in some way.

A much more convincing explanation of this (apparent) ambiguity was subsequently proposed by Giuliano Marini, according to whom this aspect was present not only in Gramsci and Marx (though with a prevalence for the 'superstructural' and 'structural' meaning of the concept in question) but also in the common source they both drew on: Hegel. According to Marini, in fact, 'in Hegel *civil society* (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) includes, systematically and literally, the following contents: a) … the system of needs which is the place where wealth is produced … the place … of the economy … b) … the administration of justice …; c) the *police* in the eighteenth-century meaning of administration … But this same moment, which is entirely twofold, also includes the corporation, a limited and concrete totality, which encompasses those who carry out the same work … an organism both economic and ethical in the broad sense, to which Hegel assigns an important systematic role, since

84 Note that for the most part throughout the *Notebooks* the habit of emphasising Gramsci's typical meaning of the concept by underlining and/or using inverted commas becomes less frequent. Extremely significant in this regard are the examples in Notebooks 19, § 31 (second draft of Notebook 1, § 130) and 25, § 5 (SPN, 52–4; which goes back to Notebook 3, § 90): in both cases, in the rewriting Gramsci abandons the inverted commas that in the respective A texts underscored the 'superstructural' use of *civil society*.

85 Texier 1988, p. 22.

86 Gerratana 1969, p. 173.

it is from this that there arises the sense and the need for the vaster ethical totality which is the state'. In short, 'observing Hegel's civil society as a whole, we see in it economic, juridical and political aspects'.[87]

This is clearly why Gramsci, after having used the concept of *civil society* only five times up until October 1930 – that is, until the 'arrangement' of Notebook 4, § 38 included – uses it in 19 notes (around half of the occurrences of the phrase) written between the following November and December 1931, which, as discussed above, represented the period of maximum crisis for the 'structure-

87 Marini 1990, pp. 316 ff. However, the present author does not agree with the continuation of the essay, which – as, moreover, explicitly stated by Marini – reproposes, though in a more reasoned and updated version, Bobbio's thesis, maintaining that 'civil society, moving from Hegel to Marx, becomes entirely an economic moment; moving from Hegel to Gramsci it loses all of its economic moment'. In fact, this statement appears contradicted by the texts previously quoted that present the 'structural' meaning of the concept (see again, above all, Notebook 4, § 38), as well as several of the same passages taken from Marini, beginning with Notebook 6, § 88, where Gramsci writes that 'certain elements that fall under the general notion of the state must be restored to the notion of civil society (in the sense, one might say, that state = political society + civil society, that is, hegemony protected by the armor of coercion)'. Here Marini is obliged to make a correction to the text, so that it reads 'state = civil society + political society, that is, hegemony protected by the armor of coercion', and to attribute to 'civil society' the moment of 'consent' and not that of 'force' (ibid., p. 324). But it would be necessary to do likewise for Notebook 6, § 136, in which Gramsci speaks of the 'hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (civil society), which is the basis for the state in the narrow sense of governmental-coercive apparatus'; for Notebook 8, § 142, in which he provides 'elements for formulating the issue: identity-distinction between civil society and political society; hence, organic identification between individuals (of a particular group) and the state, so that "every individual is a functionary" … "Individual initiative", however, is understood as something that pertains to the economic sphere'; and above all for Notebook 10, II, § 7 (FS, 439), where he speaks again 'of the concept of the state and of the distinctions within it between civil society and political society, between dictatorship and hegemony, etc'. A *lapsus calami* is of course always possible, even for a careful writer such as Gramsci; however, four (at a minimum) would be too much. Another note that contradicts Marini's interpretation is found in Notebook 6, § 24 (December 1930), in which 'ethical state' and 'civil society' are opposed; Marini admits that 'it is quite difficult: 1) to find any internal coherence in this passage, and 2) integrate it with the preceding one' (p. 325), that is, with the above-quoted Notebook 6, § 88 (March–August 1931), or better yet, with the re-interpretation (and rewriting) that Marini himself has undertaken. In the end he decides to 'leave aside the rather dubious and controversial passage' in Notebook 6, § 26 (p. 327), which, moreover, is not at all isolated: the same distinction between 'ethical state' and 'civil society', concepts Marini feels should always be united, if not synonymous, reappears, in fact, in Notebook 10, II, § 14 (FS, 464–7).

superstructure' pairing, which was a prelude to the transition to alternative categories.[88] In effect, at a time when the architectural metaphor was becoming increasingly inadequate in analysing the historical movement, and the other images destined for a certain period to be used together with it (if not replace it) had not yet appeared in the *Notebooks* with that specific function, Gramsci found it useful to adopt a terminology which, already in the Hegelian tradition (as well as, though to a lesser extent, the Marxist one as well), allowed him to move beyond the too clearcut dichotomy between the economic and politico-ideological spheres.[89] A tradition which, moreover, he had occasion to refer to again in a direct way during 1931, when he undertook the translation of Marx in Notebook 7, in which initially he systematically translated the German expression *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as *bourgeois society*, only then to change it to *civil society* when the context so required.[90] It is no coincidence that this occurred above all in Notebook 6 (the previously defined 'notebook of the state') and in the context of a more strictly political reflection, in controversy above all with the Italian imitators of Hegel, from Croce to Gentile, De Ruggiero to Volpicelli and Spirito.

Thus, it is this historical-practical reflection – which, in several notes from Notebooks 1 and 3 from early 1930 (the first occurrence of *civil society* dates back to March), precedes and to a significant extent inspires the initial theoretical meditations in Notebook 4 (from the second half of the year) – that explains Gramsci's reassessment in 1931 (Notebook 6) of his initial philosophical principles (Notebook 7) and represents a prelude and then accompaniment to the theoretical 'turning point' at the start of 1932 (Notebook 8). In fact, between January and March of that year the concept of *civil society* recurred seven other times, after which the link between theory and practice in Gramsci's thinking became permanently solidified. What had in the meantime become the problem of the 'relations of force' was by then viewed only from the point

88 See above, in this regard, Part 1, Chapter 1, § 4 and Part 2, Chapter 4.

89 As Texier 1988 noted, in Notebook 6, § 24 Gramsci shows he is aware of the multiplicity of meanings for the term 'civil society', given that he states that 'the sense of the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the whole of society, as the ethical content of the state', is 'the sense in which [the expression in question] is often used in these notes'; this 'means he uses [it] … equally in another sense (or in several other senses) and that he is entirely aware of this' (pp. 7 ff.). Just as he is aware of the 'vague and primitive' nature of Hegel's political categories (as well as, though to a lesser degree, those of Marx), as explicitly affirmed (and argued) starting from Notebook 1, § 47, which preceded his initial reflections on *civil society* and *political society*.

90 See in this regard Gramsci 2007, p. 745 and note 21.

of view of one who, in his analyses, wished to determine on each occasion a line of action (an 'initiative of will', as he would significantly state in Notebook 13, § 17; SPN, 177–85) in the hope of overturning these relations in favour of the subaltern classes. However, from this perspective even the distinction between civil and political society had decidedly been overcome, on the one hand because it still went back to a dichotomous and not a dialectical view of reality,[91] and on the other due to that same ambiguity of meaning that previously had led to Gramsci's adopting that distinction. This is the reason the concept of *civil society* returns (after another year of neglect from the second half of 1932 through the first half of 1933) in only two newly written notes in 1933.[92] However, more importantly, over two-thirds of the texts in which it had been previously analysed were rewritten, and among these only three were sections written between the end of 1930 and the end of 1931, none of which coming from Notebook 6, almost all of whose political reflections remained as a single version,[93] thereby revealing their transitional nature. This does not necessarily take away from the importance of these notes (even more so given they are part of a 'philosophy' in which the search for and subsequent criticism of the results clearly prevails over the systematic, and thus static, treatment of the notes); rather, it confirms their importance – as decisive though provisional stages – to the 'rhythm of the thought as it develops', which only a diachronic reading of the Notebooks appears capable of understanding.

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91 This is clear in the final occurrence of the term in 1932: 'Between the economic structure and the state with its legislation and its coercion stands civil society' (Notebook 10, II, § 15 (June); FS, 166–7); evidently this category cannot be extended further.

92 In particular §§ 33 (FS, 323) and 47 of Notebook 15 (May 1933), both of which are polemical: the first toward the 'point of view of "Saggiatore"', the second toward that of Sergio Panunzio. Moreover, the latter text once again links the *civil society* to the structural sphere in that it is a 'function of social groups in the productive life'.

93 In fact, of the 211 notes that make up this notebook, little more than one-tenth (25) were redrafted.

CHAPTER 6

Gramsci and the Marxist Tradition

1 'Marx, the Author of Concrete Political and Historical Works': *Caesarism and Bonapartism*

The previous pages have emphasised, on the one hand, Gramsci's increasingly clear criticism (at times explicit, more often implicit) of Marxism-Leninism, which at that time was at its height in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, and on the other the gradually closer examination of Marx's original message, which can be schematised in terms of the shift from its literal formulation to its more profound and vital spirit,[1] thanks also to the re-interpretation and translation of the original texts in 1931. Here only a sort of sample survey of an extremely vast area will be undertaken, beginning with how the Marxian category of *Bonapartism* (or, as it was more often defined, *Caesarism*) was used in the *Notebooks*. In fact, it has been noted above that 'Gramsci's "Caesarism" has clear areas of similarity and derivation (moreover, explicitly stated) with regard to Marx and Engels's "Bonapartism"', for example, that outlined in the *18th Brumaire*, which is mentioned several times in the *Notebooks*.[2] However, this concept 'is … used by Gramsci in an extremely flexible way',[3] a flexibility that is even clearer from a diachronic examination of the uses of the two terms.

As shown above for other Gramscian categories, these also appear several times incidentally before becoming explicitly defined, in this case between May and November 1930 on the occasion of the parallel writing of the first

1 One can fully agree with Izzo 2008, p. 49 and *passim*, when he speaks of a 'true "return to Marx"' by Gramsci in the *Notebooks*.

2 Cf. Notebooks 3, § 52; 7, § 24; 13, §§ 18 (SPN, 158–67) and 23 (SPN, 167–8).

3 Ragionieri 1969, pp. 140 and 201. Even Donzelli, Introduction and Comment to Gramsci 1981, p. 168, though noting that 'the expressions "Caesarism" and "Bonapartism" are widespread in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century political literature. The first to use them was Luigi Napoleone', and that 'Gramsci's sources … are the most varied' – for example, Michels – recognises that 'Marx's *18th Brumaire*, which raised the question of the definition of Bonapartism in relation to the class nature of the phenomena it refers to, must have had particular significance for Gramsci'. Finally, Bobbio 1990, p. 90, recalls that, of the two categories Gramsci uses synonymously, the first to arise was '"Caesarism", which developed into "Bonapartism", proposed and developed by Marx as the counterfigure, or caricature, of the first'. This is why Medici 2000 states that Gramsci usually adopts the first in a more positive way than the second (p. 71).

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Notes on Philosophy. The first occurrence of *Bonapartism* is in Notebook 1, § 158, in which 'some form of Bonapartism' is seen as the probable consequence (together with or as an alternative to 'a foreign invasion') of 'the crisis of *libertinism*' that exploded in a nation where 'there is only one class'. If the allusion to the internal battles in the Soviet Unon is clear,[4] less so is the precise meaning to attribute here to the term *Bonapartism*: in fact, 'since there exists no class dualism', but instead 'there is only one class', it does not seem possible to apply Marx's schema to the Soviet context (which, as will be shown below, Gramsci adhered to for a certain period of time), which entails the authoritarian solution of one 'strong' man (or party) where there is an equilibrium in the struggle between two classes in which one cannot manage to prevail over the other. In the absence of further clarification by Gramsci in this regard, it is reasonable to think that by this expression he meant to refer generally to the risk of a bureaucratic-military involution of the leadership group in the Soviet Union.

This hypothesis is confirmed by two notes, direct and indirect, close in time: in the first (Notebook 2, § 75, second part)[5] Gramsci describes 'certain periods of "permanent anarchy", due to the state equilibrium of the conflicting forces', during which 'a man represents "order", that is, the breaking of the deadly equilibrium by exceptional means, and the "frightened", the "mad sheep" of the petite bourgeoisie gather around him'. This contrasts with his later thought, which does not define this figure as *Caesarist* but adopts instead Michels's expression of 'charismatic leader', which only later in Notebook 4,

4 Also of this opinion is De Felice in Gramsci 1978, pp. 467–71, in annotation to Notebook 22, § 10, where the note underwent a second and final draft; see also Baratta 2004, p. 23, on the differences between the two versions of the text. § 150 of Notebook 1, *The conception of the state from the standpoint of the productivity* (*function*) *of the social classes*, (which appears shortly before the above-mentioned text) has been omitted, since there the expression *Napoleonism* [*Bonapartism*] clearly indicates the historical period marked by the rise and fall of Bonaparte. Nevertheless, some see in this section as well an 'indication of the *Bonapartist* leanings of the Soviet system' (Telò 1987, p. 97), also considering the fact that, at a later time, Gramsci would replace *Napoleonism* with *passive revolution*. It should also be noted that in 1926 the leftist French intellectual, Vaillant-Couturier, told Trotsky that 'the hope for the world bourgeoisie is called Bonaparte' (Flores 1990, p. 43).

5 According to Francioni, 'Nota introduttiva al Quaderno 2', in Gramsci 2009a, vol. 5, pp. 3–4, the first part of the section in question (until '… more long-lasting than human interests') forms, together with §§ 73–4, a group of notes that are initially isolated (not by chance contained in the second half of the notebook), 'in all likelihood written in 1929, perhaps in February or the following months'; the second part of § 75, marked 'by an evident change in aspect', dates to August–September 1930.

§ 69 (November 1930) would be considered synonymous to the other.[6] In the second passage (Notebook 4, § 52), which originally had the same title as Notebook 1, § 158 – *'Animality' and industrialism*, later replaced by *Americanism and Fordism*, which would become the most common rubric title – and is transcribed together with it in two consecutive sections of Notebook 22 (§§ 10 and 11, respectively; SPN, 298–301 and 301–6), he wrote that 'the tendency exhibited by Leon Davidovich' (Trotsky, that is) '[characterised by] the "will" to give supremacy to industry and industrial methods … through coercive means … would have ended up, necessarily, in a form of Bonapartism; hence it was necessary to break it up inexorably'.[7]

With respect to the notes considered up to this point, this represents a step forward toward the subsequent 'arrangement' of the topic in a B text from August–September 1930 (which is contained in the miscellaneous Notebook 3 (§ 119)), which again shows itself to be 'ahead' of the reflections in the contemporary or even subsequent A texts of the *Notes on Philosophy* in Notebook 4. Here Gramsci, criticising the actions of the post-Risorgimento leadership classes, assigns them responsibility for the fact 'the government … has functioned as a "party": it has placed itself above the parties not in order to harmonize their interests and activities … but rather in order to disunite them, to separate them from the great masses, and to gain "a force of nonpartisans who are attached to the government by paternalistic bonds of a Bonapartist-Caesarist type"'. To find an example of this phenomenon 'one should analyze the so-called *dictatorships* of Depretis, Crispi and Giolitti, as well as the parliamentary phenomenon of *transformism*', where 'the bureaucracy became precisely the state-Bonapartist party'.

Undoubtedly these situations lend themselves more than the Soviet one to the definition used here, which, however, as in the previous case, would not be codified until the autumn of 1930, in particular Notebook 4, § 69 (November).

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6 As it is not possible here to speak about the complex relationship between Gramsci and Michels, the reader is referred to Medici 2000, pp. 111–23 and the bibliography discussed therein.

7 It is interesting to note that this text (November 1930), which, as elsewhere, formally approves (if not in its method, certainly in its substance) the 'liquidation' of Trotsky by Stalin, contains in reality a purely implicit condemnation of the latter. In fact, in what way is the doctrine criticised here different from the theory, and above all the practice, of 'forced industrialization', which precisely in those years Stalin imposed on the Soviet Union? (On this topic, see Boffa 1990, pp. 9–166). Pons 2008, p. 428, also underlines that Gramsci's criticism of Trotsky became in the *Notebooks* 'an expedient for actually criticizing Stalin's new ultra-radical political direction and more likely the Comintern's sectarian line as well'.

But shortly before this a further and important step forward was taken with § 66, where Gramsci wrote that

> in a number of countries, then, the influence of the military element in politics does not mean simply the influence and weight of the military in the technical sense but the influence and weight of the social stratum that is the primary source of the technical military element (especially of subaltern officers);

that is, as he had explicitly stated a bit earlier, 'the medium and small rural bourgeosie'. He then added:

> This criterion, I believe, is quite useful for analyzing the most hidden aspect of that specific political form usually known as Caesarism or Bonapartism and for distinguishing it from other political forms in which the technical military element predominates, perhaps in ways that are even more conspicuous and exclusive,

in that they present 'an equilibrium of the urban classes struggling with each other that obstructs "normal" democracy'; however, it has been rightly observed that this represents 'an overly transparent reference to Italian experience and the growth of fascism'.[8] Nevertheless, Gramsci was anxious to clarify immediately that

> this phenomenon always assumes historically specific forms: Caesar represents a different combination of elements from that represented by Napoleon I, and the latter is different from that of Napoleon III, or from Bismarck, etc. … In other words, these observations are not sociological schemata, they are practical criteria of historical and political interpretation that must always be removed from schematic generalizations and incorporated into a concrete histocio-political analysis.

This last passage thus contains the seed of both the definition of the category of *Caesarism* – like the others derived from concrete historical analysis – found in § 69 of Notebook 4 and its dissolution; there is a reason why, in the second draft of the two texts, written together with other notes in Notebook 13, § 23 (SPN, 210–18), their order is inverted with respect to the original one, presenting: 1)

8 De Felice 1977, p. 166.

the 'classical' definition of *Caesarism* (A text: Notebook 4, § 69); 2) the historical exemplification (taken from Notebooks 7 and 9); and 3) the questioning of the concept (A: Notebook 4, § 66).

The momentary 'solution' to the problem proposed in Notebook 4, § 69, instead adopted without reserve the Marxian schema of the *18th Brumaire*: 'At a certain point in the course of history, classes become detached from their traditional parties', which thus 'no longer represent their class or their class fraction. This is an extremely delicate and dangerous crisis because it opens the field to men who are charismatic or claim to have been sent by providence'. This occurs 'when the rank and file of one or more parties does not very quickly go over to another party that better epitomizes the general interest. The passage from one party to another is an organic [and normal] phenomenon'; nevertheless, 'when the crisis is not resolved in this organic manner but instead produces the man sent by providence, it means that a static equilibrium exists, it means that no class, neither the conservative nor the progressive class, has the strength to win; but it also means that even the conservative class needs a master'. Having abandoned the precautions of the preceding § 66, Gramsci now holds that 'in every country the process is different, although the content is the same', since, as shown above, it is precisely the 'content' (that is, the material basis of society) which is decisive in determining historical events.[9] Moreover, implicit here is the definition of parties as 'the nomenclature of the classes', at least in 'normal' times, which contributes in forming a somewhat schematic framework common to that of Gramsci's other 'arrangements' at the end of 1930, starting with Notebook 4, § 38, though in clear contrast with the more open subsequent formulations.

Returning to the concept of *Caesarism* or *Bonapartism*, after it had been so clearly defined it was almost totally neglected for about two years, when, in fact, there were only four occurrences in all (in Notebook 6), and, moreover, in contexts that were not very relevant, similar to those in which the initial meanings of the two terms appeared. The passages involved here are § 40 where, with regard to the English government, Gramsci observed that 'within the government, there is a restricted group that dominates the whole cabinet, and, furthermore, there is a bigwig who exercises a Bonapartist role'; § 84, where he wrote that 'the "juridical" continuity of the organizing center must not be of the Byzantine-Napoleonic type (that is, a code conceived as permanent)'; § 93, where he defined the 'encyclopedic notion' of 'Caesaro-papism – the emperor is also the religious head, even though his predominant characteristic is military-

9 See above, Chapter 4, § 2.

secular'; and § 97, which contains a new criticism of the 'parliamentary and electoral system', in that it 'provides a fertile terrain for this particular form of demagogy that culminates in Caesarism and Bonapartism with its plebiscitary regime', and in which he again associates 'Caesar' with 'charismatic leader'. If one considers that these notes from Notebook 6 were written before August 1931, then it would be another year before the concepts they contained were again presented, confirming Gramsci's loss of interest in the main 'categories' defined during 1930, which coincided with a more general crisis in his thinking the following year.

His continuing work on Notebook 9, § 133 (November 1932) appears, moreover, to directly tie in with the framework he had presented two years earlier in Notebook 4, § 69:

> It can be said that Caesarism or Bonapartism expresses a situation in which the forces in battle were balanced, so that it could only end in mutual destruction. When the progressive force A struggles against the regressive force B, it can happen that neither A nor B wins but both are bled dry, allowing a third force to intervene from outside to subjugate what remains of A and B.

However, such a schematisation is in sharp contrast with the overall progress of Gramsci's investigation, which had by then become decidedly oriented toward increasingly flexible and elastic formulations, and thus toward the abandonment of rigid positions of this type. This approach occurs during the same text, even through the appearance of several earlier warnings, for example in the above-mentioned Notebook 4, § 66. In fact, Gramsci begins by reaffirming that *Caesarism*

> does not always have the same historical meaning. There can be a progressive or a regressive Caesarism, and the exact meaning of each form, in the final analysis, can be reconstructed by actual history and not by a sociological schema.[10] … Moreover, the 'Caesarist' phenomenon is a formula which is more polemical-ideological than historical-political. There can be a 'Caesarist solution' even without a Caesar, without a great 'heroic'

10 According to Vacca 1988, pp. 453–8, the expressions 'progressive Caesarism' and 'regressive Caesarism' indicate the Stalinist and fascist regimes, respectively, which share in common a negative judgment, but not for this reason are placed on the same level. On this topic see, finally, the oft-quoted volume by Rossi and Vacca 2007.

> or representative personality. The parliamentary system has afforded us the mechanism for such compromise solutions.

In effect, 'every coalition government represents an initial degree of Caesarism, which may or may not develop into higher degrees of Caesarism'; thus, 'in the modern world', 'the mechanism of the Caesarist phenomenon is different from what it was up until Napoleon III', since 'the trade union and political forces, with the incalculable financial means small groups of citizens have available to them, complicate this phenomenon'. Gramsci concludes that 'we have here the same situation as with the Jacobin-1848 formula of the so-called "permanent revolution"'. In this regard, the editor of the chronological edition of the *Notebooks* refers the reader to the 'final part' of Notebook 1, § 44,[11] which states:

> As regards the 'Jacobin' slogan which Marx directed at the Germany of 1848–49, its complex fortunes should be examined. Revived, systematized, elaborated, intellectualized by the Parvus-Bronstein group, it proved inert and ineffective in 1905 and afterward: it was an abstract thing that belonged to the scientific laboratory. The tendency which opposed it in this intellectualized form without, however, using it 'intentionally', in fact employed it in its historical concrete, living form adapted to the time and place.

In the same way that Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in contrast to Trotsky and his followers, went beyond the letter of Marxian teaching (the 'Permanent Revolution'), applying the vital spirit to a new historical situation (developing the concept of hegemony, the crux of which was already contained in Marx),[12] Gramsci intended to do the same with the other canonical formula, 'Bonapartism', going beyond its interpretative schema, which was already inappropriate to the changed general conditions of society. This does not mean – in fact, it necessarily implies – Gramsci's continual reference to the deepest meaning of the doctrines and above all methods of Marx, with particular regard for 'Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works' (Notebook 7, § 24): above all, the *18th Brumaire*, whose theoretical schema were now abandoned but which until the above-quoted passage was proposed by Gramsci first as an example for countering 'in theory, as primitive infantilism … the claim, presen-

11 Gerratana, *Q*, 2858.

12 See above, Part 1, Chapter 2.

ted as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure', and later on (Notebook 13, § 18; SPN, 158–67) as the antidote to *Economism*, in order to 'consider how much relative importance is given on the one hand to immediate economic factors, and on the other to the concrete study of "ideologies" '. As others have noted, in this work Marx in effect 'rejects any idea that structure and superstructure are immediate and mechanical reflections of one another', '[emphasising] that the objective condition of the exploitation of the working classes is not mechanically reflected in class consciousness'.[13]

In delving further into Gramsci's work, Notebook 9, § 136 only confirms the conclusion regarding the preceding § 133; in fact, 'the general schema of forces A and B engaged in a potentially catastrophic struggle … is, in fact, a generic hypothesis, a mathematical-type sociological (based on political science) schema'. Yet it is true that 'this hypothesis can be made more concrete and more closely resemble the actual historical reality … by explaining better several fundamental elements', for example, 'what progressive force is intended here'. Moreover, what is new with respect to the previous pages is that this note introduces the 'human variable' in the 'emergence' of the various combatting forces; for example, while Napoleon III represented the result of such contrastive factors, it was 'tailored to him; that is, based on the stature of the man, which wasn't so elevated'.

Similarly, in Notebook 14, § 23 (January 1933; SPN, 222–3) Gramsci wrote, perhaps thinking critically of some of his previous formulations, that 'it would be an error of method (an aspect of sociological mechanicism) to believe that in Caesarism – whether progressive, reactionary, or of an intermediate and episodic character – the entire new historical phenomenon is due to the equilibrium of the "fundamental" forces'. This is shown by the subsequent analysis of the outcome of the so-called 'Dreyfus Affair' in France, which, while producing 'a particular situation of equilibrium between the conflicting forces – both incapable in their respective camps of giving autonomous expression to a will for reconstruction', not only did not lead to Bonapartism but saw 'elements of the dominant social bloc itself' intervene to thwart 'the Caesarism of the most reactionary part of that same bloc'. According to Gramsci, this was not an isolated episode but rather 'characteristic', since 'there are other modern historico-political movements of the Dreyfus type to be found, which are certainly not revolutions, but which are not entirely reactionary'.

13 Cavalli 1993, p. 73.

This is true in particular regarding an analysis of the two great authoritarian regimes in the first decades of the twentieth century: fascism and Stalinism. As Franco De Felice wrote, 'Gramsci dedicated several very important reflections in the *Notebooks* to the relation between Caesarism and fascism, which allowed him to specify the use of Caesarism and at the same time its inadequacy for understanding the fascist phenomenon'.[14] The category of Bonapartism is even less applicable, unless taken in a broad sense, even for the declining situation underway at that time in the Soviet Union.[15] The setting aside of the concept of Caesarism as a tool of concrete political analysis, before its definitive abandonment, led in fact to a return in several notes from 1933 to the weak meaning seen at the start of the prison reflections and during the 'crisis' of 1931 (behaviour similar to that for other concepts analysed above). In Notebook 14, § 68 (February; SPN, 240–1), with regard to the 'fundamental disagreement' between Trotsky and Stalin, the position of the former was judged to be erroneous, 'an anachronistic and anti-natural form of "Napoleonism"',[16] as Gramsci had already stated in Notebook 1, § 158.

Indirect confirmation of this is found in Notebook 15, § 60 (June–July), in which Gramsci once again analyses a situation in which

> The historical forces butt heads over their 'extreme' program. The fact that one of these forces assumes the role of 'synthesis' in overcoming the opposing extremisms is a dialectical necessity, not an *a priori* method. Finding on each occasion the point of progressive equilibrium is … part of that political line that is very precise and holds great promise for the future.

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14 De Felice 1977, p. 184.

15 Angelo Scucchia, prison companion of Gramsci, recalls that 'Antonio said: "one cannot speak of Bonapartism in a negative way when one considers that Bonaparte was not the suffocator of the bourgeoise revolution but the one who led the same revolution to its possible consequences … Thus the term Bonapartism has no meaning when shifted from France to the Soviet Union, where there was still the regime that arose out of the Bolshevik Revolution" ' (Quercioli Paulesu (ed.) 1977, p. 225). This was probably a view expressed by Gramsci during a conversation with his companions toward the end of 1930, a further confirmation that the 'political' Gramsci was always ahead of the 'theoretical' one, who, during those months, was 'arranging' the category of *Caesarism* in the *Notebooks* (Notebook 4, § 69), while the 'theoretical' Gramsci would only advance beyond the 'political' one two years later.

16 Of note here is the lexical variant *Napoleonism* (already present at the start of the prison reflections; see above, note 4), as well as the fact that this term is not in inverted commas, further indicating Gramsci's moving away from this concept.

Clearly absent here is any reference to the figure of 'Caesar' or to the 'charismatic leader', if you like. Moreover, as Gramsci would write shortly thereafter in Notebook 17, § 21 (September–November),

> The theory of Caesarism, which today predominates … was introduced into the political language by Napoleon III, who certainly was not a great political historian or philosopher. It is certain that in Roman history the figure of Caesar is not characterized only, or mainly, by 'Caesarism' in this narrow sense.

Several C texts from Notebook 13, §§ 23 (SPN, 210–18), 27 (SPN, 219–22) and 37 (partial translation in FS, 92–4) remained to be examined, which, in all likelihood, were subsequent to the definitive abandonment of the concept of Caesarism (even in its weakest meaning), to which the note quoted above was a prelude.[17] A reading of the three sections in question appears to confirm two peculiarities of the *Notebooks* which have been underscored above beginning with the analysis of the problem of the 'relations of force': 1) the 'inertia' of the A texts, almost all of which were re-copied entirely in notes later on, even when they were no longer coherent with the evolution of the contemporaneous B texts; 2) the few but significant variations Gramsci introduced, 'warning lights' for an awareness of this incongruence as well as of the impossibility of a radical reformulation of the initial drafts.

More specifically, § 23 in Notebook 13 (SPN, 210–18) begins with the rewriting of Notebook 4, § 69, with the addition of an explicit reference to the *18th Brumaire*, confirming what was said earlier about the shift from the 'letter' to the 'spirit' of the historical Marx.[18] There follows the transcription of § 66 from Notebook 4 ('*On Certain Aspects of the Structure of Political Parties in Periods*

17 As already noted (see above, note 57 to Chapter 1), Notebook 13 was finished by 19 November 1933; nevertheless, considering that § 25 explicitly cites a source from October–December 1933, the subsequent §§ 27 and 37 should be assigned an earlier date, as well as, in this author's view, § 23, because of the similarity in content (including a reference to the gradual rise to power of Hitler).

18 Of the same opinion is Mangoni 1977, p. 401: 'The addition of an explicit reference to Marx's text would thus appear to confirm that over the period 1930–32 the *18th Brumaire* became one of the theoretical reference points for an understanding of fascism as well', even though there was a rejection of the category of *Caesarism* in defining it. Moreover, it must be considered that Marx himself, 'in the preface to the second edition of *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (June 1869), had absolutely "forbidden" the use of Caesarism outside the study of ancient history' (Canfora 2009, p. 38).

of Organic Crisis'),[19] also almost literal and preceded and followed by other notes taken from Notebooks 7 and 9, but not, as one would have expected, from the notes to Notebook 9 on *Caesarism*, which are instead drawn on in § 27 (SPN, 219–22). The reasons for this apparent anomaly are to be searched for, on the one hand, in the incongruence of the Notebook 4 texts, which codify this concept, with those in Notebook 9, which in a certain sense deconstruct it; and on the other hand, in the fact that, since Gramsci had abandoned the 'strong' meaning of the category, there was also less need to join together in a single note the scattered pages that concerned it. The notes on *Caesarism* in Notebook 9 no longer were in need of further polishing and were thus transcribed completely, maintaining the order of writing, in the aforementioned § 27.

Finally, in § 37, together with other *Notes on French national life*, which gave the heading to the section, Gramsci innovated with respect to Notebook 1, § 131 concerning the referendum that sanctioned the assumption of absolute power by Napoleon I and Napoleon III, observing that 'every sanction given by universal suffrage and the referendum occurred after the fundamental class had become strongly concentrated either in the political field or even more so in the political-military one around a "Caesarist" personality'. Here the use of inverted commas, in addition to signalling, as at other times, a distancing from a concept that had become outdated within not only Gramsci's thinking but his lexis as well, appears to refer to Napoleon III himself, to whom, in the nearly contemporaneous Notebook 17 § 21, he had attributed the paternity of the term.

2 Engels and the Marxist 'Vulgate'

If during the entire prison reflections Gramsci thus remained faithful to Marx, in fact even continuing to deepen his examination of the reasons for the adherence to these doctrines by one who above all did not to wish to refer to himself as a *Marxist*, the same cannot be said of the other 'founder of the philosophy of praxis'. In fact, with regard to Engels, doubts were raised above all about the perfect coincidence of his thinking with that of Marx, at least as regards several specific aspects, as well as on the validity of some of his statements or works. This does not mean there were not numerous similarities between the two thinkers, at times even some of which Gramsci himself was not aware.[20] Gramsci was particularly severe in his criticism of the *Antidühring*, which he viewed as, if not the precursor of the mechanistic and deterministic

19 The italics again indicate the section heading.

20 Cf., for example, Texier 1999.

degeneration of Marxist theory, certainly as the involuntary originator and justification for this, against which Gramsci waged an increasingly bitter battle in the *Notebooks*.[21]

It is not within the scope of the present work to assess the correctness of Gramsci's opinion (even more so since the *Engels-Debatte*, more than a century after the death of the author of the *Dialectics of Nature*, seems far from resolved); of more interest here are the time frame, manner and possible causes that led to the gradual development of this opinion. In any event, it is interesting to note that this view was anything but foreign during Gramsci's era; in Italy it was shared by both revolutionary trade unionists, who refused 'the so-called Engelsian interpretation of historical materialism as a deterministic conception of history',[22] and a reformist theorist such as Rodolfo Mondolfo (more on him below), just to name two theorists whose views on Marxism were extremely different from one another, as well as from Gramsci's.

Internationally, it suffices to mention that the greatest biographer of Engels, Gustav Mayer, wrote that Engels 'considered economic disturbances one of the most effective means of bringing about political turbulence';[23] and that in Marx's funeral elegy he stated that 'just as Darwin discovered the law of the evolution of organic nature, Marx discovered the law of the evolution of human nature',[24] identifying these and similar convictions as the origins of Engels's many erroneous historical predictions.[25]

Returning to Gramsci, it is worth examining more closely the process that led him to distance himself more and more from Engels, also because this reveals not unexpected analogies with the overall evolution in his thinking, starting from the 'crucial' nexus between structure and superstructure. In fact, after briefly expressing doubts about Engels in Notebook 1, § 34 (December 1929–February 1930), which, moreover, remained in single draft,[26] the reference and quotations regarding the two fathers of historical materialism began to occur regularly, beginning with the oft-mentioned §§ 43–4 (thus, by the end of March 1930). Nevertheless, Notebooks 1–3 do not yet raise the question of

21 Similar consideratons to those made here are found in Prestipino 2002, p. 456 ff.

22 Bobbio 1986, p. 65.

23 Mayer 1977, p. 160; it should be kept in mind that the first edition of the book dates to 1934 and is thus contemporaneous to the *Notebooks*, even if Gramsci could not have read it.

24 Ibid., p. 247.

25 Cf. ibid., pp. 161–7, 196 ff. etc.

26 'Could one say about American pragmatism (James) what Engels said about English agnosticism (I think in the preface to the English edition of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*)?'.

the relation between Marx and Engels, and any references – to one, the other, or both, implicit or explicit – are always placed in positive or non-judgemental contexts.[27]

An initial thematic treatment of the problem occurred instead in May 1930, not by chance in Notebook 4, § 1, in which Gramsci inaugurates the *Notes on Philosophy 1*, setting forth the fundamental *Question of method* for the study of 'a conception of the world that has never been systematically expounded by its author-thinker', which provides the starting point for the present work:[28]

> Engels' contribution should not be underestimated, but neither should Engels be identified with Marx, nor must one think that everything Engels attributed to Marx is authentic in an absolute sense. There is no doubt that Engels has evinced a disinterestedness and a lack of personal vanity unique in the history of literature … But the fact is that Engels is not Marx.

From this derives the need to uncover

> what is not Marxism in Engels's presentations of his friend's thought; actually, in the cultural world, this distinction is never made and Engels' relatively systematic expositions (especially the *Anti-Dühring*) are taken to be an authentic source, and often the only authentic source. Therefore, I think that Mondolfo's book is very useful as an indication of one way to proceed, apart from its intrinsic values, which presently I do not recall.

However, at that moment Gramsci's attention was elsewhere, and the 'indication of one way to proceed' remained for a long time unutilised. In fact, it can be said that for over two years he proceeded with the same attitude he criticised in the 'cultural world', continuing to quote without distinction one and/or the other of the two 'friends';[29] moreover, he found and developed numerous indic-

27 An example here is the conclusion to Notebook 1, § 43, with a reference to 'the views of Marx and Engels on the agrarian question in Italy from 1848 to 1860', regarding which Gerratana, *Q*, 2478, observed that 'in all likelihood Gramsci was aware here of the article … *Due lettere di Marx su Mazzini e i contadini in Italia*, "l'Unità", 26 February 1926'; in remembering the article by heart Gramsci associates Engels and Marx, showing that at that moment the two authors were not distinguished in his mind. See also Notebooks 1, § 153; 2, § 57; 3, § 40; etc.

28 See above in this regard the general premise of the present work.

29 In fact, he begins again to speak of 'Marx and Engels' already in the subsequent § 3 of Notebook 4, as well as in Notebooks 8, § 128 (April), and 9, § 97 (April–May 1932).

ations in the *Antidühring*[30] (memorised or taken from other sources, starting from Croce), using this text and others by Engels even to oppose the dogmatic interpretation of Marxism that later he would see as deriving from them.[31]

This is why Gramsci's statement, even in appearance, in Notebook 11, § 34 (partial translation in SPN, 446–8, and dated between August and December 1932) is surprising and unexpected. With some changes with respect to the first draft of Notebook 4, §§ 43 and 47, Gramsci wrote:

> Clearly in Engels (*Antidühring*) there are many ideas that can lead to the deviations of [Bukharin's] *Essay*. One forgets that Engels, despite the fact he wrote over a long period of time, left behind little material on the work he promised would demonstrate the dialectical cosmic law [that which would become the *Dialectics of Nature*], and he exaggerated in stating the identity in the thinking of the two founders of the philosophy of praxis.

In fact, neither does this 'turning point' arrive entirely unexpectedly; rather, it is preceded by various 'premonitory signs' in several of the preceding notes: for example, in Notebook 4, § 40 (October–November 1930), regarding the fact that the transience of ideologies also holds for historical materialism, Gramsci observed that 'such an intepretation is *foreshadowed* by Engels when he talks about a transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom', though adding that this thesis needs to be '*elaborated*':[32]

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30 See for example Notebook 4, § 45 (October–November 1930) in regard to 'Engels's assertion that historical development will, at a certain point, be characterized by the transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom', found 'in the second chapter of the third part of the *Antidühring*' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2644).

31 Reference here is above all to Notebook 4, § 26 (May–August 1930): 'Engels had warned against this dogmatism in some of the things he wrote during his final years (cf. Engels's two letters on historical materialism translated into Italian)'; these refer to the letters 'sent, respectively, to Joseph Bloch on 21 September 1890, and to Heinz Starkemburg on 25 January 1894 … which were included in Volume IV of the *Works* of Marx-Engels-Lassalle', held by the Fondo Gramsci and 'quoted also by Croce in *Historical Materialism and Marxist Economics*' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2638). In fact, these later letters by Engels include expressions that can justify the Gramscian interpretation, such as the following, taken from the first letter: 'Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction' (Engels 2001, p. 36). See also Notebook 8, § 240 (May 1932).

32 The italics here and immediately above have been added. In the C text of Notebook 11,

> Obviously, this transition occurs among men not in nature (even though it will have certain effects on the way nature is perceived and on scientific views); hence it is not possible to talk about the natural history of mankind and to compare human events with natural events, other than metaphorically.

This is the equivalent of denying Engels's 'dialectical cosmic law'.

Several pages later, in Notebook 4, § 49 (during the same period of time), Gramsci observed:

> At a certain point (in the *Anti-Dühring*, I believe) Engels asserts, more or less, that the objectivity of the physical world is proven by the successive studies of scientists (cf. the exact text). In my view, this assertion by Engels should be *analyzed and rendered more precise*.[33]

Gramsci would do this in July–August of 1932, in Notebook 11, § 17 (SPN, 440–6), where, in innovating with respect to the A texts grouped together in the second draft,[34] he would write that 'Engels' formulation that "the unity of the world consists in its materiality demonstrated by the long and laborious development of philosophy and natural science"[35] contains the germ of the correct conception'. It is necessary to examine more closely his criticism, above all in the second draft of Notebook 4, § 47, that is, in the same Notebook 11, § 34 to which his 'turning point' regarding Engels was traced back earlier in the present book. In fact, the first part of this section presented the preceding quote almost word for word, accompanied again by the warning that it must be 'analysed and made more precise' and by the query: 'Does science mean theoretical activity or the practical-experimental activity of scientists, or a synthesis of the two?' Of interest here is not so much the various answers Gramsci gives two years removed from the A and C texts – in 1930 with a strong

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§ 62 (SPN, 404–7), clearly aware of what he had just recently written in the preceding § 34 on the ideas behind Engels's words that could lead to dogmatism, Gramsci added: 'with subtlety and delicacy'.

33 Italics added. On this specific topic see Cospito 2008a.

34 Reference here in particular is to Notebooks 8, §§ 215, 217 and 177; and 7, § 47 (cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 2895).

35 This is a 'quotation … from Chapter 4 of Part I of the *Anti-Dühring* … Since Gramsci doesn't appear to have had access to the *Anti-Dühring* while in prison, the quotation is assumed to be indirect, even if the source has not been identified' (Gerratana, *Q*, 2895–6).

practical orientation[36] and in 1932 a more balanced mix of practice and theory[37] – as the fact that in the first case the answer is presented as an interpretation of Engels's text ('I think that … Engels wanted to affirm …'; 'Engels is referring …'), while in the second there is a distancing from the previous canonical approach to Engels's assertions, which clearly are no longer viewed as authoritative: 'One might say that …'; 'there can no be doubt that …' This is easily understandable if one considers that, following the note in Notebook 11, § 34, after the second draft of the note on 'the position of professor Lukács', who perhaps 'in reaction to the baroque theories of the *Popular Manual*, has fallen into the opposite error, into a form of idealism',[38] Gramsci for the first time correlates Bukharin's theses with those in the *Anti-Dühring*.

Moreover, the view that certain of Engels's statements could lie behind errors and deviations was already implicit in Notebook 10, II, § 10 (May 1932; SPN, 402), which discussed the thesis of the proletariat, the 'heir to classical German philosophy':

> Is it to be understood as a historical circle already completed, in which the vital part of Hegelianism has already been definitively absorbed once and for all; or should it rather be understood as a historical process still in motion in which the necessity for a philosophical cultural synthesis is being renewed? To me the second answer seems correct. In reality the reciprocally unilateral position contrasting materialism and idealism, criticised in the first thesis on Feuerbach, is being repeated, and now, as then, though at a more advanced moment of history, a synthesis remains necessary at a higher level of development of the philosophy of praxis.

An additional sign of the distance between Gramsci and Engels is provided by a comparison of Notebook 11, § 32 (SPN, 468–70) with its first draft (Notebook 4, § 32), where the attribution of the thesis 'that quantity becomes quality' is

36 'I think that it should be taken to mean the latter and that … the scientist-experimenter is a "worker" … and is not pure minded' (Notebook 4, § 47).

37 'A synthesis of the two … The scientist-experimenter is *also* a worker, not a pure thinker, and his thought is continually controlled by practice and vice-versa, until there is formed the perfect unity of theory and practice' (Notebook 11, § 34, italics added). Shortly before Gramsci had written that 'the relation between theory and practice becomes even closer the more the conception is vitally and radically innovatory and opposed to old ways of thinking' (Notebook 11, § 12).

38 Notebook 4, § 43, analysed in Chapter 1, § 3 in the first part of the present work.

removed from the author of the *Anti-Dühring* and assigned to 'the first volume of the *Critique of Political Economy*': that is, to Marx's *Capital*.[39]

The effects of this distancing are also seen in the C texts of Notebook 11 that follow § 32, where this distancing is definitively endorsed, starting with § 44; with respect to text A (Notebook 4, § 18), the statement in the preface to *Anti-Dühring* that 'the art of working with concepts is not something inborn or given with ordinary consciousness; it is, rather, a technical labor of thought that has a long history, not more and not less than the empirical research of the natural sciences'[40] – which in Notebook 7, § 5 (November 1930), was still referred to positively[41] – is now judged to be 'expressed in non-rigorous terms'. A bit further on, in the *History of Terminology and Metaphors* in Notebook 11, § 50 (FS, 315–18),[42] Gramsci, introducing changes with respect to the first draft of Notebook 8, § 207 (January–February 1932), again feels the need to 'distinguish between the two founders of the philosophy of praxis, whose language does not have the same cultural origin and whose metaphors reflect different interests'. The leitmotif of Gramsci's criticisms is still that of combatting the deterministic 'deviation' of Marxism, which thus leads to the severe judgement on the *Anti-Dühring*, confirmed in a B text from May 1933, Notebook 15, § 31: 'the origin of many errors in the *Essay* is to be found in the *Antidühring* and in the attempt, too exterior and formal, to devise a system of concepts around the sound nucleus of the philosophy of praxis, which satisfies the scholastic need for thoroughness'. Nevertheless, this did not stop Gramsci from continuing to take Engels's main work as a model for his *Anti-Croce* (which is also an *Anti-Gentile*).[43] It thus becomes clear that Gramsci, in rewriting in the second draft of Notebook 16, § 2 (SPN, 382–6) the note from Notebook 4, § 1, in which for the first time he had signalled the need for 'Engels [not to] be identified with Marx', in addition to confirming that 'Mondolfo's volume seems very useful, at least for the guiding line which it traces', had rid himself of initial

39 See again above, Part 2, Chapter 1, § 1. On Gramsci's reading of *Capital*, see again Cospito 2011.

40 As Gramsci himself indicated, this is an indirect quotation from Benedetto Croce's *Historical Materialism and Marxist Economics*.

41 'Engels has *correctly* [italics added] stated that "intellectual instruments" are not born out of nothing, they are not innate; rather, they are acquired, they have developed and are developing historically'. It should be noted, however, that missing in this case is the parallel with the natural sciences, not the least of the causes of his subsequent impossibility to fully accept Engels's statement.

42 The italics indicate the section heading.

43 Cf. Notebooks 10, I, § 11 (FS, 354–6) and 11, § 51 (SPN, 371).

doubt about 'its intrinsic value', even if it is not likely he had read *Historical Materialism in Friedrich Engels* in the meantime. In fact, after having listed it in a letter to Tatiana (25 March 1929) as the twenty-sixth and next-to-last book of which only the first seven were to be sent to him immediately, 'the rest much later',[44] Gramsci explicitly requested it in a second letter on 11 April 1932,[45] precisely during the time his definitive break with the author of the *Anti-Dühring* was being completed. It is not exactly clear if and when he effectively had the chance to read it, since the work is in the Fondo Gramsci collection and has numerous underlinings in pencil, though without any prison marks. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to note the correspondence, even literal at times, between Gramsci's criticism of Engels and certain pages in Mondolfo's work.

In fact, even according to Mondolfo, 'though often ignored, the difference in views between the two founders of historical materialism, Marx and Engels, on the same fundamental point of the system is notable'.[46] In particular, 'Engels, based above all on natural philosophy, often tends, more in his verbal expression than in the reality of his thinking, somewhat more toward materialism'; this accounts for 'his facility in translating his thought into rigid and unilateral expressions', which results in a 'propensity toward dogmatism',[47] which in turn leads to misunderstanding.[48] 'Without doubt in some of Engels' writings, particularly in the *Antidühring*, there is no lack of expressions that would lead one who focuses only on the words and does not know how to penetrate the spirit to see in his conception an automatism in historical development'.[49] Nevertheless, this occurs because 'compared to Eugen Dühring, who saw only political relations and force as the *primary* and *fundamental* factor, and *economic dependence* as only a secondary effect, Engels naturally found himself pushed to accentuate the predominance of economics over history',[50] giving the impression of an 'automatic fatalism', a tendency which, moreover, 'is precisely what Engels opposed in the chapter on eternal truth in the *Anti-*

44 LP I, 256–9.

45 LP II, 160.

46 Mondolfo 1912, p. V (this is the edition to which Gramsci refers).

47 Ibid., p. 9; see also pp. 72ff.: 'the love of dialectical schematism led Engels to give a catastrophic expression to a theory which in and of itself was not catastrophic'.

48 Cf. ibid., pp. 197, 261, 267, 323, 329 etc.

49 Ibid., p. 209.

50 Ibid., p. 193; cf. also p. 190: 'one can find in the *Anti-Dühring* … the most absolute expressions of naturalistic monism and rigid determinism' (similar considerations are made on pp. 221, 291, etc.).

dühring'.[51] In conclusion, while it is true that in Engels there was support for a possible deterministic and evolutionary interpretation of history (Mondolfo is thinking of Bernstein in particular), 'nevertheless such statements found here and there do not certainly constitute all of [Engels'] thinking',[52] whose 'formulas provide us with a true economic determinism while his theories and historiographical applications present us with historical materialsim', in which the 'economic moment is [...] only as a *last resort* the determinant of history'.[53]

In light of these summarising quotations, it is clear that during his prison research Gramsci is in effect following Mondolfo's 'directive', even if not necessarily consciously, since in other passages in the Notebooks Mondolfo himself is stamped 'as a positivist'.[54] For his part Mondolfo 'excluded that Gramsci knew [his] thinking in depth and was influenced by it'.[55] Thus there is truth in Christine Buci-Glucksmann's view that 'in Gramsci it is not difficult to recognize the effects of Mondolfo's criticism of Engels ... Nevertheless, there are considerable differences between Mondolfo's view of historical materialism as "integral humanism", with all its ethical reformism, and that of historical materialism as ... *revolutionary* humanism',[56] deriving in the last analysis from a different assessment of Lenin's work: for Mondolfo this moves away from Marxism while for Gramsci it constitutes its necessary and inescapable development.[57] In conclusion, it can be said that *Historical Materialism in Friedrich Engels* represents only a source, though an important one, which Gramsci uses above all due to the lack of original texts by Engels in his possession (above all the *Anti-Dühring*, vast excerpts of which are found in Mondolfo's monograph) and thus the need to 'squeeze blood even from a stone', the more so since 'in this instance there are no stones'.[58]

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51 Ibid., pp. 207 ff. Further on, in response to other dogmatic Engelsian expressions, Mondolfo asks: 'is this the true thinking of Engels?'. No, in his opinion; 'there are other passages in the *Anti-Dühring* that provide a more complete view' (ibid., p. 235).

52 Ibid., p. 299.

53 Ibid., pp. 271 ff.

54 Cf. Notebooks 8, § 218; 11, § 2; and 16, § 9 (SPN, 388–99).

55 Quoted in Tamburrano 1963, p. 225. Matteucci 1951, p. 139, upholds the opposite view, to which Mondolfo responded polemically in Mondolfo 1968, pp. 279–304; see also Anderson 1977, pp. 398–409.

56 Buci-Glucksmann 1976, p. 436.

57 As Buci-Gluksmann recalls, Gramsci had already polemicised with Mondolfo on this topic in an article of 15 May 1919, on *Leninismo e Marxismo* (cf. ibid.).

58 Letter to Tania of 22 April 1929 (LP I, 260–3). For an overall consideration of the relation-

Before leaving this question, several similarities between the evolution of Gramsci's thinking on Engels and that on Antonio Labiola should be noted. The latter was almost unanimously considered the leading Italian Marxist philosopher, even more so than Gramsci. After some initial perplexity at the start of 1930 in the crucial note in Notebook 1, § 44,[59] the opinion on Labriola during 1930–1 is always positive, in particular as concerns his view of the philosophical self-sufficiency of Marxism (Notebook 4, § 3). In Notebook 8 § 198 (February 1932) Gramsci recognised that 'the need to construct a "philosophy of praxis"' – which represents the principal aim of his prison reflections – was 'pointed out to him' by Antonio Labriola. Immediately thereafter, in the subsequent § 200 (February–March), there is a sudden about-face: 'In order to compose a thorough study on Antonio Labriola, one needs to take into account, among other things, the bits and pieces of conversations that have been reported by his friends and students'. In several of these in particular it is possible to find a 'pseudo-historicism', a 'mechanical and rather empiricist way of thinking', similar 'to Gentile's way of thinking', 'not dialectical or progressive but somewhat reactionary'; in short, 'very nebulous and confused thinking'.

From this moment on, alongside texts (either in a new version[60] or a second draft)[61] that reaffirm his positive judgement of Labriola or, in any event, interest in his work,[62] are others that raise objections. In Notebook 11, § 1 (FS, 157–9), second draft of Notebook 8, § 210, Gramsci adds to passages from the A text the accusation of 'vulgar evolutionism'; in § 5 (FS, 160), modifying the first draft (Notebook 8, § 172) and explicitly drawing on the preceding § 1, Labriola is compared to Hegel and Machiavelli for his belief that 'slavery is the cradle of liberty … B. Spaventa however … makes the opposite comment: "But the cradle is not life. Some would like to see us confined for ever to the cradle"'. Finally, Notebook 8, § 168 (November 1931) is among the very few passages from text A that Gramsci cancelled without a later rewriting in a second draft. In this passage he proposes the following study: '*Antonio Labriola and Hegelian-*

ship between Gramsci and Mondolfo, from his writing as a youth to the *Notebooks*, see Medici 2000, pp. 14–59 and 205–22; Pasini 2007.

59 'The explanation given by Antonio Labriola of the lasting power of the Junkers and Kaiserism in Germany, notwithstanding the great capitalist development, adumbrates the correct explanation'.

60 Cf. Notebook 9, § 106.

61 Cf. Notebooks 10, II, §§ 31 (FS, 383–9) and 60 (FS, 318–19); 11, § 70 (SPN, 386–8); 19, § 5 (CW, 245–7).

62 Cf. Notebook 11, § 16 (SPN, 452–7).

ism.[63] A study of how Labriola moved from his initial Herbartian and anti-Hegelian positions to historical materialism. In a word, Labriola's dialectics'. This project would, in fact, not be explicitly developed, which, however, does not exclude the presence of objective elements of continuity between Labriola's view of the 'philosophy of praxis' and Gramsci's proposal.[64]

In any event, the (even temporal) coincidence of Gramsci's break from both Engels and Labriola probably owes to the opinion widespread in Italy at that time that Labriola was a faithful propagator of the theories of the author of the *Dialectics of Nature*, with whom he was in fact friendly and had an intellectual collaboration. Gramsci may have acquired this from Croce, who, in *How Theoretical Marxism Was Born and Died in Italy*, recalled that the 'Herbartian professor'[65] had suggested he read Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, defining it as 'the greatest general book on science produced by socialists, as well as being a treatment of general philosophical ideas that objectively represent the greatest value today'.[66]

3 Conclusion: Gramsci, from Lenin to Marx

The importance of Crocean philosophy as an element of comparison – at times critical, always dialectical – which was always decisive for Gramsci's thinking, not only in the *Notebooks* but even going back to his initial articles, could be further examined in a separate work.[67] However, this goes beyond the

63 The italics are Gramsci's and indicate the title of the section. Cf. Gerratana, *Q*, 2394 and 2809.

64 This is one of Frosini's theses in Frosini 2003, pp. 84ff.; nevertheless, this is a rather controversial critical question, which cannot be examined here. For more on this see also Liguori 2005, pp. 71–80; and Punzo 2008, pp. 27–43. For a review of the most recent interpretations of Labriola's criticisms, with particular reference to the above-mentioned relationship between Gramsci and Labriola, see Bondì 2007, pp. 359–76.

65 This definition of Labriola's is contained, as Gramsci notes (Notebook 8, § 200), in Croce's '*Critical Conversations* (Second Series)', preserved among Gramsci's prison books and widely quoted in the *Notebooks*.

66 Croce 1921 [this is the edition Gramsci read in prison], p. 281. Even according to Gentile, Labriola derived his interpretation of the 'philosophy of praxis' from the *Anti-Dühring* (cf. Gentile 1955, pp. 125–8; Gramsci must have been very familiar with this book, seeing that, in an article on *Socialism and 'Current' Idealism* written in his youth (February 9, 1918), he defined Gentile as, after Lenin, 'the Italian philosopher who has produced more than any other in the field of thought in the past few years' (now in PPW, 50).

67 For more in this regard, see the recent and oft-mentioned papers by Fabio Frosini, and above all Frosini 2008.

scope of the present book, whose ideas must now be drawn together. On the other hand, it also tends to confirm what was written a half century ago: 'the fundamental nexus for explaining Gramsci's thought is not the Gramsci-Croce nexus, nor even the Gramsci-Italian traditional culture one, but the Gramsci-Lenin nexus'.[68]

Gramsci himself suggests this when, in Notebook 7, § 33 (probably from February 1931), he takes up the question of the

> production of [new] *weltanschauungen* that enrich and nourish the culture of a historical epoch and the kind of production that is philosophically oriented along the lines of the original *weltanschauungen*. Marx is the creator of a *weltanschauung*, but what is Ilyich's position? Is it purely subordinate and subaltern? The answer is to be found in Marxism itself – science and action … The establishment of a class of leaders (that is, of a state) is equivalent to the creation of a *weltanschauung*. The statement that the German proletariat is the heir of German classical philosophy: how is this to be understood? Was it not Marx's intention to indicate that the function of his philosophy – which became a theory of class – would became a state? For Ilyich, this actually transpired in a particular territory. I have referred elsewhere to the philosophical importance of the concept and fact of hegemony, attributable to Ilyich. The realisation of hegemony means the real critique of a philosophy, its real dialectic … Marx initiates intellectually a historical era that will probably last for centuries; that is, until the demise of political society and the advent of regulated society. Only then will his conception of the world be superseded (the conception of necessity ⟨superseded⟩ by the conception of liberty). To set up a comparison between Marx and Ilyich in order to establish a hierarchy is foolish and pointless. They are the expression of two phases: science and action, that are simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous. Likewise, from a historical standpoint, a parallel between Christ and St. Paul would be absurd. Christ – *weltanschauung*; and St. Paul – organization, action, expansion of the *weltanschauung*. They are both equally necessary and of the same historical stature. Christianity could be called, historically, Christianity-Paulinism, which would be a more accurate appelation. (The only thing that has prevented this from happening is the belief in the divinity of Christ, but this belief is itself a historical factor, not a theoretical one).

68 Carlo Salinari, quoted in Manacorda 1977, p. 408.

The subsequent developments in the *Notebooks* confirm not only the indissoluble link between Lenin and Marx but the deep continuity Gramsci wished to create, at least subjectively, beween his personal contribution in developing the philosophy of praxis and the theory and practice of Lenin. Gramsci even goes as far as attributing to 'Ilyich' the origin of many of what critics unanimously consider the most original and unique ideas in the *Notebooks*; not only the concepts of *hegemony* and *war of position* analysed above but the interest in 'national questions' (Notebook 2, § 48), 'the need to study and work out, historically and not sociologically, the elements of popular psychology, [and to do so] actively (that is, in order to transform them by means of education into a modern mentality) and not descriptively' (Notebook 3, § 49); the struggle in favour of the single school (Notebooks 4, § 45, and 11, § 62; SPN, 404–7); and, above all, the complex problem of the translatability of languages (Notebooks 7, § 2 and 11, § 46; FS, 306).

The relation between Gramsci-Lenin-Marx should be interpreted based on the latter aspect; just as the Bolshevik leader knew how to *translate* the spirit of Marx's doctrine into a historical-political situation entirely different from the one in which it was conceived, even at the cost of going *against Capital* (history going beyond the book), in the same way the *Notebooks* proposed an extremely liberal and open *re-translation* of Lenin's formulations – an example here is the rejection of Lenin's ingenuous realism in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (which, moreover, was never explicitly quoted) in favour of a theory of knowledge capable of being the heir in this field to German classical philosophy as well, from Kant on[69] – into a scenario that is equally different, if not more so: the long war of position the West must undergo to achieve the transition from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom through the introduction on a world scale of the 'regulated society'. Nevertheless, the outcome of this translation is often quite far from the original, and above all involves theoretical-political categories such as passive revolution, Americanism and Fordism, Constituent Assembly (considering only the more well-known ones) that not only are extraneous to Leninism but arise from the attempt at interpreting the problems caused by the involution of the state that came out of the Bolshevik revolution and its impact on the international workers' movement. As a result, in the *Notebooks* in particular the nexus between Gramsci and Lenin is historical more so than theoretical in nature, while the original proposal of a philosophy of praxis (and thus a general theory of history and politics), capable

69 On this topic see Cospito 2008a.

of responding to modern-day challenges, aims at developing the foundations of the critique of economics set forth by *his* – and in many respects still *our* – Marx.

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