PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE IN GRAMSCI'S RECONSTRUCTION OF MARXISM

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

This thesis investigates the role that philosophy and science play in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. While there is growing recognition of the importance of philosophy in Gramsci's prison work, the importance of science and its relationship to philosophy often go unremarked. Yet both fields were important to Gramsci's prison project. The bulk of the thesis consists in a detailed philological study of the unabridged Italian edition of the *Prison Notebooks* by Valentino Gerratana which brings out the importance of both philosophy and science to Gramsci's work, as well as their inter-relationship. In fact a crucial part of Gramsci' work while in prison, the part belonging to a second and most productive phase of the prison work according to current scholarship on Gramsci, consists in an effort to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy of praxis within which a special place was reserved for science. Gramsci in fact dealt extensively with both natural science in its relationship to philosophy and, even more importantly, with social sciences like economics and political science. This was in keeping with the insight that Marxism was born out of the encounter between philosophy, economics and politics, which constituted the three keystones of Marx's new theory for Gramsci. The first part of this thesis analyzes Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, examining how the foundational concepts of praxis and human nature were interpreted by Gramsci in such a way as to lay the foundations for his theory of science. It then considers this theory of science in detail, examining first the place that Gramsci's reflection on natural science played within his reconstruction of Marxism, then considering how he laid the foundations for economics and political science within Marxism. Two novel concerns emerge in this discussion: the centrality of social science to Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism and the importance that the individual played in both his philosophy and in this social science, particularly in economics.

ABSTRACT (FRENCH)

Cette thèse explore le rôle de la philosophie et de la science dans les *Carnets de prison* de Gramsci. Alors que l'importance de la philosophie dans les écrits de prison de Gramsci continue de gagner en reconnaissance, l'importance de la science et de son rapport avec la philosophie est souvent négligée. Ces deux champs de recherche sont toutefois aussi important l'un que l'autre dans le projet réalisé par Gramsci lors de ses années passées en prison. La plus grande partie de cette thèse consiste en une analyse philologique détaillée de la version italienne complète des *Carnets de prison* établie par Valentino Gerratana. Elle met en évidence la double importance de la philosophie et de la science dans les écrits de Gramsci et le rapport qui les unit. Effectivement, une part essentielle de l'oeuvre de prison de Gramsci, identifiée par la recherche portant sur Gramsci comme un second volet distinct et plus productif de ses écrits de prison, se présente comme un effort de reconstruction du marxisme comme philosophie de la praxis au sein de laquelle une place particulière est réservée à la science. En fait, Gramsci s'est largement intéressé aux sciences naturelles dans leur rapport avec la philosophie et, de manière plus importante encore, avec des sciences sociales comme l'économie et la science politique, et ce en cohérence avec l'idée que le marxisme est né de la rencontre de la philosophie, de l'économie et de la politique, les trois piliers de la nouvelle théorie de Marx chez Gramsci. Dans un premier temps, cette thèse analyse la reconstruction du marxisme comme philosophie de la praxis par Gramsci en examinant comment les concepts fondamentaux de praxis et de nature humaine sont interprétés par Gramsci de manière à jeter les bases de sa théorie de la science. La thèse s'intéresse ensuite à cette théorie de la science en détails, examinant d'abord la place des réflexions de Gramsci sur les sciences naturelles au sein de sa reconstruction du marxisme, puis en considérant la manière dont il établit les fondements de l'économie et de la science politique au sein du marxisme. Deux préoccupations nouvelles émergent de cette discussion: la centralité des sciences sociales dans la reconstruction du marxisme par Gramsci et l'importance de l'individu dans sa philosophie et dans ces sciences sociales, particulièrement en économie.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that a crucial part of Gramsci's prison work has an intimate unity and coherence dictated by a single overriding concern: laying the theoretical foundations for a reconstruction of Marxism. This task had two aspects for Gramsci. First, it included defining Marxism as a philosophy or theory of history. As understood by Gramsci, this philosophy focused on praxis, or human practical activity, thus marking a radical departure from idealist and materialist philosophies alike. Second, the task included sketching the place of various sciences – natural science, economics and political science – within Marxism reconstructed as a philosophy. In fact, Marxism itself was for Gramsci a philosophy or theory of history, not a science of society. But within this philosophy an important role was reserved for natural science and even more so for social sciences like economics and political science. After all, as echoed by Gramsci in several notes, Marx's theory had emerged from a synthesis of German philosophy together with English economics and French political thought. The upshot of this argument is to propose a new picture of Gramsci, one that is perhaps closer to contemporary Analytical Marxism than to the cultural or linguistic turn. Gramsci's interest in the notion that Marxism was a synthesis of philosophy, economics and politics betrays in fact a concern with the foundations of knowledge and explanation in social science. These were the traditional foundational concerns associated with the rise of modern social science. These traditional concerns, however, do not make him any less interesting from the vantage point of today, in the wake of the cultural and linguistic turn. Quite the contrary.

This interpretation of Gramsci's work, in fact, is still especially relevant to five fields of current scholarship. The first two fields are in Gramscian studies, within which a small renaissance is occurring thanks to philological interpretations of the *Prison Notebooks*. In this introduction I will address first (1) the new philological interpretations of Gramsci that I build upon. I will then

address (2) the more established interpretations of Gramsci as a linguistic or cultural theorist. The next two fields are in Gramscian studies too, but they are also both related to the history of social and political thought. They concern, in particular, the intellectuals and intellectual movements that were contemporaries of Gramsci's. Here it is important to make a distinction between: (3) those contemporaries of Gramsci's that he himself specifically addressed, like Benedetto Croce and Antonio Labriola; and (4) those contemporary intellectual movements to which Gramsci is seen today to have contributed. These include currents like Western Marxism, with which Gramsci shared the effort at reconstructing a non-deterministic Marxism. They also include debates like the *methodenstreit*, or struggle over the methods of the social sciences, with which Gramsci shared an effort at defining the foundations for explanation in social science. Lastly, the fifth field involves (5) current sociology and social theory, within which notable efforts at reconstructing Marxism have taken shape, starting with Analytical Marxism and continuing with more recent calls for a Sociological Marxism. The rest of this introduction (6) reviews methodological questions relating to the reading of Gramsci that is being proposed and, finally, (7) provides a chapter by chapter outline that anticipates the argument as elaborated throughout the thesis.

(1) New Philological Interpretations of Gramsci

The new interpretation of Gramsci's work that is being proposed here does not seek to displace previous interpretations altogether but to qualify them within the context of a complete picture of Gramsci's work. Completeness is key here. It goes hand in hand with the claim that there is an underlying unity and coherence to a crucial part of Gramsci's work. This claim is partially aimed against the temptation to unravel the *Prison Notebooks* (Morton 2007), a temptation spurred perhaps by the fragmentary nature of this complex work, which naturally encourages one to break down Gramsci's argument into different strands, a variety of bits and pieces to be reassembled *ad hoc*. On the contrary, the main aim here is to contribute an essential piece towards a complete picture of this complex and eclectic thinker, to the construction of the 'Gramsci *integrale*' as opposed to

the ‘Gramsci in-tid-bits’ (Haug 1999, 101). Indeed, one of the drawbacks of some previous interpretations, including in particular those of Gramsci as (chiefly) a cultural and linguistic theorist, has been the exclusive focus on only one aspect of Gramsci’s thought to the neglect of others. These interpretations should not be rejected altogether but put into perspective within a broader whole. And the starting point for arriving at this broader whole, for understanding Gramsci and getting a complete picture of his work, should be, methodologically, a philological reading and, substantively, his effort to reconstruct Marxism, which is arguably the very cornerstone of his thought.

A new season of Gramscian studies is arguably beginning and this thesis seeks to contribute to it in several ways, the first and most fundamental of which consists precisely in showing the unity and coherence of Gramsci’s work stemming from his project for a reconstruction of Marxism. One reason why the reconstruction of a complete picture of Gramsci as a thinker is both possible and timely is that he is arguably now free of political-intellectual mortgages (Haug 1999, 101). Some of the differences in interpretation that have characterized much of the literature on Gramsci were due in fact to the desire to claim him for one orthodoxy or another – be it Leninist, Crocean idealist or Western Marxist, etc. As of the early 1970s observers thought that although gaps in the knowledge of Gramsci’s work had been filled there was still no agreement on a complete picture of Gramsci (Davidson 1972, 459-61) and this continued to be the case through a good part of the 1990s (Liguori 1996, 236-40, 254). Will this state of affairs change now? It is debatable whether Gramsci will ever be truly free of political-intellectual mortgages and will thus become the object of a truly disinterested scholarly study. There is however a more apposite reason why the reconstruction of the ‘Gramsci integrale’ is both possible and timely. This is the rise of new philological readings.

Several reasons besides weariness with sterile ideological debates are adding to the rise of new philological readings. For one thing, an English translation of the complete, unabridged version of the notebooks is finally being prepared by Joseph Buttigieg (Ruccio 2006). This will serve as the basis for new

philological readings in English long advocated by Buttigieg (Buttigieg 1994, 99-100, 113). This translation is itself a testament to the fact that the need for philological readings is acutely felt. For another thing, a complete and revised national edition of the whole corpus of Gramsci's work is under way in Italy. The archival and philological work in preparation for this notable undertaking has involved the *Prison Notebooks* too. Here I rely on the original, unabridged edition of the *Notebooks* proposed by Valentino Gerratana (Gramsci 1977), on which the Buttigieg translation is based, but I also take into account revisions of it that have been proposed in the work by Gianni Francioni (Francioni 1984) that, years back, paved the way for the national edition. The rise of new philological readings, a new crop of studies specifically aimed at a philologically accurate reading of Gramsci's work (Frosini 2003, 2010; Cospito 2011; Thomas 2009), has both built and expanded upon this work of scrupulous recovery of Gramsci's prison project.

This thesis deliberately builds upon these new studies. Besides their philological method, it borrows their focus and some of their most basic substantive points. The focus follows from a philological analysis of the drafting of notebooks by Gramsci. This analysis suggests that a number of notebooks came to have special importance for Gramsci. I follow Fabio Frosini in drawing attention to four thematic notebooks, 10-13 as per the Gerratana edition, all started by Gramsci in 1932. These notebooks mark a turning point and, arguably, a new beginning, in Gramsci's work, separating a first from a second and most productive phase of work (Frosini 2003, 66-72; Thomas 2009, 114-5). These four 'special' notebooks deal with Croce's philosophy (Notebook 10), an introduction to philosophy, including a critique of Bukharin's sociology (Notebook 11), intellectuals (Notebook 12) and Machiavelli and political science (Notebook 13). They were written approximately at the same time, largely, though not exclusively, by gathering, rewriting and ordering notes that had been previously jotted down in miscellaneous notebooks. I also address Notebook 16, on culture, another thematic notebook which forms a complementary strand of work to the 'special' Notebooks 10-13 (Cospito 2010). Only where relevant I have drawn from the notebook on the Risorgimento (Notebook 19) and Americanism and

Fordism (Notebook 22) and from the few miscellaneous notebooks (Notebooks 14, 15, 17), which Gramsci kept after 1932 and which arguably show him working on crucial new thoughts that emerged in the process of drafting Notebooks 10-13 (Cospito 2011, 59-61). My focus is thus on thematic notebooks belonging to Gramsci's second phase of work. These clearly show how his work actually crystallized around a series of topics to which Gramsci attached enough importance that he set aside his earlier study plans, only to return to them in his third phase of work, for example, with Notebooks 19 and 22.

A number of substantive points follow from the philological analysis and consequent focus on Gramsci's second phase of work. They concern the centrality of philosophy and science to Gramsci's work in this second phase. I expand upon the new philological studies in drawing attention to the importance of philosophy in this phase, as well as in Gramsci's work more generally. Without doubt, the 'question of philosophy' played a central role in Gramsci's reflections, alongside the desire to 'settle accounts' with his erstwhile philosophical culture (Frosini 2003, 18). There is a close analogy, here, with Marx's settling of accounts with his own philosophical culture, in this case constituted by Hegel and the Young Hegelians, as well as Feuerbach. But below I also tie this importance to the notes on science and to the foundational role of Notebooks 10-13 vis-à-vis the rest of Gramsci's thought. These notebooks show precisely that unity of purpose and coherence that was born out of an overriding concern to lay the theoretical foundations for a reconstruction of Marxism. They constitute an effort to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy of praxis and sketch out a theory of knowledge focusing on science and its role within Marxism thus reconstructed. I thus emphasize aspects of this reconstruction that have been relatively neglected in the new studies. Regarding philosophy I find, for example, that the concept of immanence was certainly important to Gramsci's work (Thomas 2009, 339; Frosini 2010, 33-9, 114-47; 2003, 143-9), but alongside that of praxis, or practical activity. Human nature was another concept, alongside praxis, that Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism relied upon.

It is in dealing with science in Gramsci's work that I expand the most upon the new philological readings, which have only just began to recover the importance of science to the *Prison Notebooks*. Regarding science, in particular, I find that the discussion of economics and politics within his philosophical notebooks (10 and 11) was not due simply to the desire to go to the roots of Marx's thought, deemed to have originated from an encounter between philosophy, economics and politics. In this view, philosophy, economics and politics are seen chiefly as three cultural components of Marxism (Cospito 2011, 127) each of which contained the new synthesis *in nuce* and each of which ought thus to have been 'translatable' into the language of the other (Thomas 2009, 359-62; Boothman 2004). Rather, I want to draw attention to the further foundational aspect of Gramsci's discussion of economics and political science, that is, to the fact that Gramsci set out to define economics and political science as well as the conditions under which 'objective' knowledge could be achieved in these disciplines. His effort was not only exegetical, in the sense that he set out to understand what Marx had meant. Nor was it only aimed at investigating the *translatio* of a doctrine across different cultural contexts – German, English and French contexts for philosophy, economics and political science respectively. It was also, and chiefly, a foundational effort, in so far as Gramsci set out to lay the foundations for the development of these sciences within Marxism reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis.

(2) Interpretations of Gramsci as a Linguistic or Cultural Theorist

This emphasis on the foundational role of philosophy and science in Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism is partially at odds with established interpretations of Gramsci as a cultural or linguistic theorist. The main goal in this case is not so much to reject as to qualify and contextualize the image of Gramsci as linguistic or cultural theorist. In English-language literature, in particular, Gramsci's name has been closely associated with cultural and linguistic studies (Forgacs 1995, 60-4; Buttigieg 1995a, 100-4). In Italian-language literature too, dominated for so long by more political questions relating to Gramsci's status as a communist leader and the degree of his orthodoxy (Liguori 1996, x-xi, 65-9, 120-3, 222-5),

interest in Gramsci's contribution to cultural studies has begun to take hold (Baratta 2000, 223-57). It is the nature of this association and contribution and its implication for Gramsci's own work that is being questioned here. Gramsci's association with cultural studies, particularly with the Birmingham School (Rojek and Turner 2000, 632-4), is an artifact of his reception in Britain, where cultural studies has tended to eclipse sociology (Turner 2006, 182). Undoubtedly, the many diverse uses to which Gramsci's work has been put are a testament to its potential. However, it is crucial to distinguish between the use to which (part of a) theory has been put and the theory itself, avoiding the pitfall of suggesting that 'the use is also a general statement of Gramsci's theory' (Davidson 2008, 69). Indeed the main point here is not that Gramsci is silent on cultural and linguistic questions, nor that he does not have major contributions to make to these fields. Rather, we ought to distinguish between these contributions and Gramsci's own theory. In keeping with this insight, the argument being developed here makes two important qualifications to views of Gramsci himself as a linguistic or cultural theorist.

The first qualification concerns the exact role of Gramsci's writings on language and culture vis-à-vis his reconstruction of Marxism, which is arguably the cornerstone of his own theory. It would be one-sided and inaccurate to reconstruct and present Gramsci's Marxism *starting* from his views of culture and linguistics *alone*. Thus, despite his university studies in socio-linguistics and undoubted interest in this subject, the numerous notes in which Gramsci did undertake to reconstruct historical materialism do not warrant the image of Gramsci as the founder of a 'vernacular materialism' (Ives 2004a, 4-5, 9-10), if by this we are to understand a materialism reconstructed starting from linguistic theory. If the linguistic turn involved replacing philosophical analysis with the study of language, then Gramsci did not belong to it. On the contrary, he saw language as a form of philosophy or worldview, albeit a disjointed and unsystematic one. Most importantly, an attentive reading of the *Prison Notebooks* does not warrant the image of Gramsci as an intellectual chiefly concerned with general questions of ideology and Marxist aesthetics, who elaborated a

'differential pragmatics' with special relevance for a postmodern agenda (Holub 1992, 4, 6-7, 20-3). On the contrary, Gramsci is understood here as a modern/ist thinker rather than a postmodern/ist one (Morera 2000, 16, 38). Lastly, despite some intriguing similarities with Bakhtin when it comes to hegemony (Brandist 1996) and shared concerns with Saussure and Wittegenstein when it comes to language, Gramsci also diverged from the latter in significant ways (Ives 2004b, 31-2). But even more important than this divergence is the fact that his main focus in the reconstruction of Marxism was on the concept of praxis understood as the interaction of subject and object, rather than with dialogism or general linguistic questions. Thus when Gramsci did set out to define and reconstruct Marxism from the ground up – and there are several notebooks that deal with precisely this task – he turned chiefly to philosophy and science, not culture and linguistics.

For Gramsci, historical materialism was to be understood as a philosophy of praxis that gave special prominence to natural and social sciences and sought to provide theoretical foundations for them. In this sense, the picture of Gramsci being proposed here is that of 'a classic' (Gerratana 1997, xi, xviii; Gervasoni 1998, 15-6; Finocchiaro 1999, passim), particularly a classic of early twentieth-century European social science, sharing many concerns of his contemporaries such as Max Weber, even more than Gaetano Mosca or Carl Schmitt. Indeed, by one account, Gramsci and Weber, for all their differences, shared with their generation a desire to produce a theory of human consciousness and shared with each other an approach to this task that was especially 'sociologically conscious' and committed to the task of uncovering the rational aspects of human culture (Shafir 1985, 50, 58). By another account the two were both interested in problems of charismatic leadership, legitimate domination and the comparative study of bureaucracies and state formation, amongst other things. They also shared a rejection of positivism that went hand-in-hand however with a desire to put the study of society on a scientific basis (Levy 1987, 391-9). It is this last point that is developed here. Gramsci was undoubtedly less of a scholar and much more of a political figure and activist, who drew from his own personal experience in his reflections (Ghosh 2001, 30, 43). But this did not get in the way

of the project undertaken in the *Prison Notebooks*, which involved, alongside other things such as cultural criticism, a theoretical reconstruction of Marxism that sought at the same time to define the scientific bases of economics and political science.

The second qualification concerns Gramsci's exact understanding of culture. Perhaps British cultural studies, which have made such a wide use of Gramsci, can be criticized for being reliant on a notion of culture seen as separate from the social, or even over and above the social (Rojek and Turner 2000, 638-9, 644-5). However, this criticism cannot be extended to Gramsci, whose views of culture and language always emphasized their embeddedness in social structures and practices. Nor is there in Gramsci an unreflecting politicization of culture, but rather an embedding of culture in socio-political practices. In this, as well as in its effort to lay the foundations for a social science that is not positivistic, it is more akin to current efforts to incorporate key lessons of the cultural turn, including a non-reductionist view of culture, while moving beyond it and some of its limitations. These include relativism and a view of culture that is entirely symbolic or linguistic, seen as separate from the social and material world. They also include a wholesale rejection of science that social historians and historical sociologists have been unwilling to endorse, preferring instead to follow a middle ground between views of their disciplines as 'immutably scientific' and those that see them as 'resolutely interpretive' to the point of forsaking any attempt at causal explanation (Bonnell and Hunt 1999, 4, 24-6). Gramsci pursued precisely such a middle ground, rejecting positivism while remaining thoroughly committed to scientific inquiry.

(3) Gramsci and the thinkers that he addressed

The importance of philosophy and science in Gramsci's work over and above that of culture and language in the reconstruction of Marxism comes out in the main theoretical debates that he engaged in. Croce, the leading Italian philosopher in Gramsci's days, stands out among his contemporaries as the most important *direct* interlocutor for Gramsci's project of reconstructing Marxism, with the partial exception of Nikolai Bukharin. The relationship between Croce's and Gramsci's

thought, including in particular his Marxism, is an old and vexed question. The young Gramsci was certainly influenced by Croce, as he later admitted, recalling that he had had a tendency towards Croceanism in his youth (Davidson 1977, 94, 106). The main question here is whether the prison writings still show this influence. After the war, as the *Letters* first and then the *Notebooks* were published, debate on this point flared up in Italy beginning with Croce's famous comment, in a review of the *Letters*, that Gramsci was 'one of us' (Liguori 1996, 48-50). It continues to this day, informing a whole strand of liberal-democratic interpretations of Gramsci's thought. The question has also been echoed in the English-speaking world. Some have argued that the differences between Croce and Gramsci were chiefly political and were accentuated by the efforts of the Italian Communist Party to use Gramsci as a banner for party-political purposes (Caserta 1984, 204, 211). Others have noted Gramsci's intellectual debt to Croce and questioned whether his critique of Croce ever truly moved beyond the confines of the latter's thought (Bellamy 1990, 313; 2001, 211). But there are also signs that even before his imprisonment Gramsci had begun moving away from this influence (Garin 2008, 89-90). Gramsci's second phase of work, including in particular Notebook 10, shows a strenuous effort to settle theoretical accounts with Croce, who figures mostly in a negative role in Gramsci's critique. Indeed Gramsci had planned to write an 'Anti-Croce' treatise and this notebook was a preparation for this work. Croce's influence is still present in Gramsci's work at this stage only in so far as he felt the need to address a number of points raised first by Croce's own critique of Marxism and then by his neoidealist philosophy that was meant to have superseded Marxism.

A subsidiary question to Gramsci's relationship to Croce is his relationship to Giovanni Gentile. Gramsci's relationship to Gentile is part of his broader relationship to Italian neoidealist philosophy, which was arguably chiefly represented by Croce, but had in Gentile another notable exponent. The two could be seen to have collaborated in bringing about the 'crisis of Marxism', as well as at promoting philosophical and cultural criticism through the influential journal *La Critica* (Jacobitti 1981, 70-3, 88-9). Because of the ascendancy that Gentile's

philosophy exercised during and after this period of collaboration, an interpretation has arisen that emphasizes some commonalities of views between the young Gramsci and Gentile. It has been suggested, for example, that Gramsci's views of the relationship between the individual and the state, together with an emphasis upon the need to overcome the divide between state and civil society, arose from a tradition of Italian political thought that had in Gentile its most notable exponent (Schechter 1990, 51-2). Most importantly here, it has been suggested that the young Gramsci was indebted to Gentile for his non-deterministic and anti-positivist interpretation of Marxism. In particular, Gramsci would have been influenced by Gentile's book, *Marx's Philosophy*, first published in 1899 and later praised by Lenin, for the interpretation of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis (Bergami 1977, 100-5). It is further suggested that still in the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci read Marx in an anti-deterministic fashion based upon the *Theses on Feuerbach* that had been pioneered by Gentile (Urbinati 1998, 383). Two points are raised by this argument. The first is whether one can speak of influence by Gentile or whether there was not simply a particular commonality between two thinkers who, in very diverse quarters, still shared an opposition to determinism. The second point is, as with Croce, whether the *Prison Notebooks* still show any influence of Gentile. But with Gentile as much as with Croce, Gramsci showed a marked desire to settle theoretical accounts and indeed he suggested that the proposed 'Anti-Croce' would also have had to be an 'Anti-Gentile'. Furthermore, there are only few references to Gentile and some of his followers like Ugo Spirito, and these are all dismissive. It is doubtful therefore whether in Gentile's case there was even just the perceived need by Gramsci to address points that he had raised.

The question of Gramsci's relation to Croce and Gentile is approached here in conjunction with the question of Gramsci's relation to Labriola, the one-time mentor of Croce's and founder of theoretical Marxism in Italy. It was Labriola, not Gentile, who had first proposed that Marxism be interpreted as a philosophy, and a philosophy of praxis more particularly. Though never quite as influential as Croce, Labriola had a great standing among Marxists in Italy and

Europe in general. Leszek Kolakowski considered him to have played an analogous role in Italy as Plekanov did in Russia and Lafargue in France (Kolakowski 1981, 175-6), as well as an important role wthin the Marxist movement more in general with his attempt 'to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy of historical praxis' (Kolakowski 1981, 192). Although in Italy he was overshadowed by Croce even as an interpreter of Marx, a 'return to Labriola' began in the 1920s, after a period of almost two decades during which his work had been largely neglected (Garin 1983, 160), if not altogether forgotten. Gramsci's project for an 'Anti-Croce' was itself, quite deliberately, part of a project for a 'return to Labriola', a return to the latter's conception of Marxism, that had been sidestepped and obscured by Croce's criticism. This conception emphasized that Marxism was a distinct and original philosophy not to be confused with either idealism or materialism and that this philosophy was to be found *in nuce* within the *Theses on Feuerbach*. It is with explicit reference to Labriola, not Croce or Gentile, that Gramsci sought to reconstruct Marxism from this starting point. Furthermore, in Gramsci's reconstruction, science featured far more centrally than it ever did in Croce's or Gentile's thought. Indeed the latter two were quite dismissive of science in general and natural science in particular and although Croce at least gave some space to economics, he largely neglected political science.

Gramsci's project for a reconstruction of Marxism is also at least indirectly relevant to other contemporaries who play a certain role in the *Notebooks,* albeit nowhere near as large as that of Croce. They are only marginally addressed in the chapters below, and when addressed it is only in the context of specific questions. However, the general argument put forward in this dissertation is undoubtedly relevant to relations between Gramsci and these thinkers. One is Piero Sraffa. He is important in understanding Gramsci's work for general reasons. The friendship that tied Gramsci and Sraffa, as well as Sraffa's closeness to and discreet participation in the *Ordine Nuovo* group of which Gramsci was part, are well known (Naldi 2000; Napolitano 2005, 407-9). So too are Sraffa's efforts to aid Gramsci after his imprisonment, as well as the

role that Sraffa played as intermediary between Gramsci and the party during those years (Rossi and Vacca 2007). Sraffa also played a key role in the preservation of the *Notebooks* (Francioni 1992a, 716-8) and, despite some continuing mistrust towards the party (Napolitano 2005, 410-1), was a precious source of information on Gramsci's biography for the first editorial initiatives after the war (Vacca 1999). The intellectual relations between Gramsci and Sraffa, however, are an altogether different matter. Some have suggested that there was almost a unity of intellectual views between them, arising out of long years of close dialogue (Fausti 1998). But in fact the intellectual dialogue that there certainly must have been between the two remains almost entirely a matter of conjecture. It is especially difficult to reconstruct because of the silence of available written sources. In Gramsci's prison years, it is exclusively to be found in the letters, not in the *Notebooks* themselves.

Sraffa is also important in understanding Gramsci's work for reasons relating to science and, in particular, to the humanistic that is, anti-positivist and non-deterministic view of science that Gramsci sought to develop. Recently, interest in the common views shared by Gramsci and Sraffa has been fuelled by the argument that Gramsci, through Sraffa, influenced Wittgenstein and particularly the latter's change of views from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is indeed possible to find analogies among the writings of all three thinkers and to conjecture an exchange of ideas based on these analogies (Davis 1993, 2002b, 2002a). This argument has been scrutinized and challenged in so far as the relationship between Sraffa and Wittgenstein is concerned. There might indeed be important commonalities but some of these were already anticipated in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Marion 2005, 402), so it might not be appropriate to speak of an influence by Sraffa, as of a convergence of views between Sraffa and Wittgenstein. Be that as it may, the reading of the *Notebooks* proposed here is directly relevant to possible shared views between Gramsci and Sraffa. It concerns, in particular, the 'anthropological way of thinking' that Gramsci developed and that might have influenced Wittgenstein's later work through Sraffa (Sen 2003, 1242, 1252; Marion 2005, 383). Despite the

growing literature on the relationship between Sraffa and Gramsci, chiefly focused on their friendship and political links, there is little in the way of defining what exactly this 'anthropological way of thinking' entailed on Gramsci's side and, especially, what was its relation to science. Moreover, it is possible to conjecture that Sraffa was at least partly influenced by his own reading of Marx's *German Ideology* and by Bukharin's intervention at a London Congress on science (Sharpe 2002, 116, 125-6), so that Gramsci's influence is in doubt. Part of the argument here aims precisely at elucidating what this anthropological stance was for Gramsci and show how it was at the heart of his views on science. This is a necessary preliminary step before Gramsci's and Sraffa's commonalities can be addressed. Some of the main points discussed below, such as Gramsci's interpretation of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, together with his views on human nature, natural science and economics, are all relevant to defining this 'anthropological way of thinking'.

Some other contemporaries of Gramsci's are relevant to his views on political science in particular. These are Mosca, Robert Michels and Vilfredo Pareto, all of whom, but particularly Mosca and Michels, are addressed in the *Notebooks*. Discussion of the relation between Gramsci and these thinkers has been dominated by the contentious claim that they were all elite theorists and critics of democracy (Dahl 1989, 266). Indeed Mosca, Michels and Pareto shared a view of politics that emphasized fraud and force and in Michels and Pareto, though not in Mosca, this was coupled with a profound disilussionment with democracy that made them close to fascism (Hughes 1977, 252-4). These attitudes can also be portrayed as stemming from a peculiarly Italian tradition of thinking about the state that conflated force and consent, as well as the thought of elite theorists (Bellamy and Schecter 1993, 128, 140-1, 153). Although Gramsci was arguably different from other Italian thinkers in this respect and had the potential to steer communism toward more humane and tolerant attitudes, he can still be seen as having sought an impossible synthesis of the contradictory impulses of his time 'toward freedom and toward compulsion' (Hughes 1977, 99, 101).

One answer to these criticisms is that neither Gramsci nor elite theorists like Mosca were truly anti-democratic. Rather, they shared a form of 'democratic elitism' which can be seen to move beyond ingrained distinctions between Left and Right thought (Finocchiaro 1999, 213-21). Another answer is that there was a fundamental democratic impulse in Gramsci's work that marks him apart from elite theorists like Mosca, Michels and Pareto. It is not just that, despite its shortcomings, Gramsci's theory at least conceived of a sphere of civil society separate from and alternative to the state (Adamson 1987-88, 332-6). Rather, Gramsci's emphasis on civil society in his theory (Bobbio 1990b, 42, 51-65) and the primacy accorded to it in his political strategy, that is, his focus on civil society as the terrain for both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects, particularly in democratic societies (Buttigieg 1995b, 3), certainly distinguish him from elite theorists and also from thinkers close to fascism like Gentile and Spirito. His reflections on civil society can in fact be seen as a response to fascism and emphasized the importance of public opinion in the interaction between state and society (Fontana 2006, 54, 72-4). Moreover, Gramsci can be argued to have moved from a youthful liberalism influenced by Croce and by Gentile in his liberal phase, to a type of 'critical communism' that sought to combine liberal ideals with the radical democratic tradition of the French revolution. This rejected the continued subjugation to elites that Mosca and Pareto saw as inevitable (Losurdo 1997, 24-6, 34, 72-5, 228-39). The argument being proposed here builds upon this approach. It suggests that Gramsci's work developed in interaction with Croce and Sraffa, his main intellectual interlocutors, and that he was more concerned to incorporate the liberal-democratic lessons of these theorists, as well as Labriola's theoretical legacy, than with elite theorists like Mosca, Michels and Pareto. In fact, as we will see below, Gramsci actually approached the major questions raised by the latter through Croce and his critique of Croce.

Most importantly, Gramsci's writings on science show the theoretical differences that marked him apart from elite theorists. It is on this point that I especially insist in discussing political science. Rejection of the elite-theorist notion of the inevitable subjugation of the masses to elites, in fact, had a

methodological or theoretical component relating to the very conception of social science. Mosca, Michels and Pareto were all active in the birth of modern political science/political sociology in Italy in this period and Gramsci was well aware of this development. The common ground that Gramsci shared with these theorists was a perceived need to put the study of politics on a scientific basis. Perhaps one can go further and argue that he shared with elite theorists a Machiavellian legacy notable first of all for its emphasis upon an anti-metaphysical stance and empiricism in the study of politics (Femia 1998, 2, 35-8). But there are also important methodological differences that emerge between Gramsci and, on the other side, Mosca, Michels and Pareto. The difference with Mosca and Pareto is particularly striking. Whereas these two thinkers sought to found a general science of politics and economics, respectively, Gramsci sought to introduce a contextual, historically sensitive, approach to these sciences. He still sought to put them on a scientific basis, but also to take into account the variability to be found in history.

(4) Gramsci and His Contemporary Intellectual Movements and Debates

The reading of Gramsci's work proposed here is also relevant to the more general intellectual movements and debates that were his contemporaries. It is in fact particularly relevant to our understanding of Western Marxism, as well as of European social and political thought more in general. Born out of the defeat of revolution in the 1920s, Western Marxism was characterized by a gap between socialist theory and working-class practice which resulted, amongst other things, in a withdrawal into abstract thought and academic questions. It resulted, in particular, in 'a contraction of theory from economics and politics into philosophy' (Anderson 1976, 93). This formal shift led to the studied silence of Western Marxism on crucial issues that had preoccupied the classical traditions of historical materialism, like the economic laws of capitalism and the political machinery of the capitalist state. 'Gramsci is the single exception to this rule – and it is a token to his greatness, which set him apart from all other figures in this tradition.' (Anderson 1976, 45) The nuances of Gramsci-as-an-exception will be addressed here. It was not just that Gramsci was informed in his writings by an

uneasy combination of the factory council movement with his intepretation of Leninism, as well as by Western Marxism (Boggs 1984, 2, 14, 24). Nor was it just that a complex relationship between philosophy and political practice was at work in Western Marxism, instead of a simple rift between the two. Rather, the predominance of philosophy in Western Marxism 'signified not a retreat but an advance to a reexamination of Marxism' (Jacoby 1981, 6-7). In Gramsci's specific case there was indeed a sustained engagement with philosophical questions, but this served precisely to lay the foundations for a reconstruction of Marxist theory that included economics and political science as crucial constitutive elements.

The attitude to science, as well as philosophy, ought thus to be appreciated in Gramsci's case and makes him stand out even more among Western Marxists, including Lukacs. Gramsci and Lukacs are arguably the two most important early thinkers associated with Western Marxism. They shared many striking, fundamental similarities, including an antipositivist bent and critique of Bukharin's sociology that have been aptly described as 'a *humanistic-historicist* interpretation of Marxism' (Löwy 1990, 301). But while they both undoubtedly shared a 'humanist epistemology' and inclination to address idealist philosophy – traits that can be argued to define Western Marxism – it is not appropriate to talk of a 'humanist and anti-science bias of Western Marxism' (Merquior 1986, 6) in so far as Gramsci is concerned. Gramsci was indeed 'the odd Western Marxist' in this respect not just because there is no 'denigration of science' in his work (Merquior 1986, 107) but because he positively sought to give science a proper place within a reconstructed Marxism. This emerges all the more starkly when we compare Gramsci's work with that of theorists who had been engaged in the 'crisis of Marxism moment' in 1897-99, including Labriola and the young Croce, besides Eduard Bernstein, George Sorel and Thomas Masaryk. Far from suggesting a neglect of science relative to these earlier contributors (Merquior 1986, 8), the comparison in Gramsci's case suggests that he went far beyond his predecessors in his efforts to give science a proper role within Marxism.

Perhaps Gramsci's deviations from Western Marxism are a further argument to be adduced to the thesis that there was no such thing as a well-defined Western Marxism neatly opposed to an Eastern variant, certainly as far as Gramsci's own thought is concerned (Losurdo 1997, 241-7). But if Gramsci's participation in Western Marxism can be questioned, alongside with the very existence of Western Marxism itself, his involvement in the 'crisis of Marxism' and, through it, in a more general crisis and subsequent 'reorientation of European thought' in the period 1890-1930 (Hughes 1977), seems more solidly established. As we will see in a number of instances discussed below, Gramsci's efforts to lay the theoretical foundations for a reconstruction of Marxism were responding directly to the earlier debate between Labriola and the young Croce during the 'crisis of Marxism' period. They were indeed seen by Gramsci as an intervention in and continuation of this debate. In this sense, Gramsci's planned Anti-Croce was also a 'return to Labriola' and the latter's position regarding the reconstruction of Marxism. The 'crisis of Marxism' is approached here as a particular moment, or aspect, in a more general crisis of European social and political thought that was not confined to Marxism alone. For example, the anti-determinist stance that gained acceptance among Western Marxists was in fact just a particular aspect of a broader anti-determinist reaction against especially crude varieties of positivism, Marxist or otherwise. This was the case in Italy, where positivism had never been particularly strong, yet a great coalition gathered to oppose it in all its guises (Bobbio 1990a, 9). Gramsci's writings on philosophy and science were thus both a response to the 'crisis of Marxism' and also an intervention in European social and political thought more in general.

As far as philosophy is concerned, Gramsci, like many of his contemporaries in Italy and abroad, was responding to the marginalization of the discipline in comparison to natural and social sciences. The reason why notebooks ostensibly concerned with philosophy also addressed science at length is at least partly to be found in the contrast that had arisen between philosophy and social sciences. The very efforts to develop sociology had assumed that it was possible to develop a science of society explicating all moral phenomena (Hawthorn 1987,

70-4, 90) and indeed the remarkable advances of science between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led it to encroach upon all fields of philosophical inquiry to the point that philosophy itself seemed to have lost its *raison d'être* (Garin 1978, 1-2). There is therefore a direct and necessary link between Gramsci's discussion of philosophy and the effort to restore its status in European thought. Marxism itself, Gramsci insisted, was a philosophy (or theory) of history and not a general science of society: philosophy as understood by Gramsci was a worldview (*concezione del mondo*) that underpinned other disciplines. Materialism, for example, had been the philosophy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century science.

As far as science is concerned, Gramsci was responding to the predominance of natural science over and above social sciences. Gramsci's prison work, in fact, included a concerted effort to address the great status that science – and natural science in particular – had acquired in the Nineteenth Century, during the heyday of positivism. Natural science had been taken as the basis for a unified field of knowledge that included all other fields, eventually resulting in a crisis once this model was found wanting (Burrow 2000, 31-60). Some of Gramsci's work is also, more specifically, a continuation of the *methodenstreit* that had flared up at the end of the Nineteenth Century, when the foundations of the social sciences had been hotly disputed. Labriola and Croce's brief collaboration and subsequent divergence focused precisely on questions of method that were central both to the crisis of Marxism and the crisis of positivism in the 1890s. Therefore the critique of Croce in Notebook 10 involved both addressing questions linked to the *methodenstreit* and to a return to Labriola. This is an aspect of Gramsci's work that is rarely appreciated and that has only been touched upon by studies that investigated links between Gramsci and earlier variants of German historicism, either via Croce or more directly (Morera 1990, 34-5). Gramsci's position vis-à-vis the debates that characterized the *methodenstreit* was to defend both the independent status and usefulness of philosophy (understood as worldview), as well as of social sciences like economics and politics, from natural science.

(5) Gramsci and Current Sociological Theory

The work of recovery of the integral Gramsci is also important because of its relevance to current social and political theory, especially, though not exclusively, efforts to reassess the Marxist legacy and reconstruct Marxism itself. It is most obviously relevant to the program of Analytical Marxism, with its deliberate effort to reconstruct Marxism along the lines of modern social science. Efforts to reconstruct Marxism have sought to identify fundamental core propositions of the theory in order to re-build it using the tools of contemporary social science and analytical philosophy (Wright, Levine, and Sober 1992; Cohen 2000). Such an approach assumes that Marxism is not simply 'a disjointed catalogue of interesting insights', but that there is an underlying unity and logic to a certain number of core propositions (Burawoy and Wright 2002, 459-60). This contrasts with the alternative approach that Marxism be ruthlessly 'recycled' regardless of preserving any presumptive unity of at least part of the theory (Parijs 1993, 1), an approach that is in line with the widespread use of Marxism made by mainstream sociology. The latter has in fact tacitly absorbed many individual insights of Marxism such as the importance of economic questions and business influence on the state, the relevance of the globalization of capital to the world economy, or the salience of structural cleavages to social conflict (Burawoy and Wright 2002, 460). It has been suggested that what Gramsci can contribute to the reconstruction of Marxism is a theory of the consensual underpinnings of capitalism that enable its reproduction (Burawoy and Wright 1990, 256; 2002, 466, 484), even though Gramsci's notion of hegemony through consensus can and ought to be expanded (Burawoy 2012, 204). Moreover, Gramsci's elaboration of the concept of civil society as distinct from both economy and the state can and ought to serve as the foundation for a Sociological Marxism designed to tackle contemporary challenges (Burawoy 2003, 194, 198, 232-4). Here I will draw attention to Gramsci's own pioneering effort to reconstruct Marxism and what he saw as the underlying unity to be preserved. Gramsci sought to reconstruct Marxism starting from the kernel of the new worldview to be found in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. In keeping with this philosophical/foundational approach, he also laid more

emphasis on the construction and justification of scientific disciplines like economics and political science. Rather than identifying and re-building a number of core propositions, therefore, he sought first and foremost to define and re-build, from the standpoint of Marxist philosophy, the theoretical foundations for the very disciplines of economics and political science.

Gramsci's emphasis upon the foundations of economics and political science is also important for its insights into general questions that are relevant for social science writ large and thus beyond the specific project for the reconstruction of Marxism. Two general questions raised by Analytical Marxism, but of general relevance well beyond its project of reconstruction of Marxism, stand out. The first question concerns the need to define a socially informed view of political science, that is, a political sociology. The question has been implicit in discussions by Analytical Marxists. The need to define the status of the political in Marxism, together with the closely related need to define 'the relationship between the political and the economic' has been raised by the issue of the transformation of a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself, that is the transformation of an economic construct into a political actor (Wright 1982, 321, 339). Both the economic and the political, it is suggested, are necessary for a satisfactory theory of class. The need to take into account both the economic and the political has continued to be important to debates among Analytical Marxists. These have addressed the relationship between the purely economic class position of a multitude of individual actors, as in the concept of class-in-itself, and the organized and politically active corporate actor, as in the concept of class-for-itself (Burawoy 1995, 141; Przeworski 1995, 170-5). Struggle and, implicitly at least, also organization, are crucial for the transition from the economic to the political. The consequent importance of political organization in the constitution of corporate actors has a parallel in political sociology more broadly, within which there have been notable works that define the study of power as arising out of organization. These works have emphasized precisely the role of organization as the foundation of all sources of power in society, besides the constitution of corporate actors (Mann 1986, 6, 17-28; 1993, 3, 6-10). What is at stake in these

works is the very definition of political sociology, as the study of power arising out of organization, and its explanatory role vis-à-vis other branches of sociology.

Gramsci's efforts to define socially informed versions of both economics and political science directly contribute to this broad question. They contribute, in particular, to the issue of the status of the political and its relationship to the economic in Marxism and social science more generally. Gramsci was concerned with defining the status of natural science, economics and political science within Marxism reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis. A special place was accorded to political science in Gramsci's schema. In fact, even more than contemporaries such as Weber, Gramsci emphasized the political dimension of social phenomena (Filippini 2009, 89-91) and it has been suggested that Gramsci's major contribution to Marxist thought has been precisely in the development of a socially informed theory of politics (Hobsbawm 2011, 318-9). This judgment refers to his contribution to the development of such concepts as hegemony, civil society and passive revolution. It is endorsed and expanded upon here in so far as his definition of a socially informed political science is concerned. Gramsci in fact worked at defining a socially informed political science, what today we would call a political sociology. There is a remarkable parallel here between Gramsci's work and that by Martin Lipset – one of the founders of modern political sociology – who stated that he had built his theory out of Aristotle, Machiavelli and an apolitical Marx (Lipset 1981, 460-2). Gramsci's work was also based largely on these thinkers, albeit differently interpreted. Gramsci's Marx was the political one, of course. So was his Machiavelli, which played such a key role in Gramsci's understanding of politics. Less well-known is Gramsci's relationship to Aristotle. It has been argued that Gramsci's theory of hegemony belongs to a tradition of classical political thought stretching back, through Machiavelli and Renaissance political theory, to Plato and Aristotle (Fontana 2000, 305, 318; 2005, 97-8). More importantly for the purposes of my argument here, Gramsci re-elaborated the Aristotelian view of man as *zoon politikon* in a non-deterministic fashion unlinked to biology, at least outwardly. For Gramsci, in fact, man was 'essentially political'.

The view of man as 'essentially political' is linked to Gramsci's contribution to a second question raised by Analytical Marxism that is of relevance beyond the confines of this paradigm and its project for a reconstruction of Marxism. This question concerns the need for microfoundations of social science, be it economics or political science. The reconstruction of Marxism that Analytical Marxists proposed expressly included the use of microfoundations of social science (Elster 1982, 454, 464; 1985, 5-8), which have come to be refined and adopted by practitioners of Analytical Marxism (Parijs 1993, 78-81), even if in a cautious and modified form (Wright, Levine, and Sober 1992, 120, 125), eventually to be endorsed even by the earliest proponents of the program (Cohen 2000, xxiii). The use of microfoundations involves providing individual-level accounts of social phenomena and not just holistic/structural accounts. This has brought to the forefront the question of methodological individualism and the borrowing of such an approach from neoclassical economics. The question has become pressing for sociology more in general with the spread of Rational Choice approaches from economics to sociology. Within sociology in particular, this spread has seen efforts to develop a 'thick' as opposed to the original 'thin' description of individuals' behavior, that is, a description that is socially and culturally informed (Hechter and Kanazawa 1997, 192-4, 208). This raises the question of the relationship between 'thin' and 'thick' descriptions. Should the latter simply replace the former in all sociological applications? Or only in some? In general, there is among sociologists a two-pronged drive towards incorporating institutions and structures as well as providing better microfoundations for Rational Choice explanations. This is especially felt within political sociology (Kiser and Bauldry 2005, 185). A recent development that is arguably complementary to this drive, exemplifying in particular the effort to provide better microfoundations, involves replacing the notion of *homo oeconomicus* with a modern re-elaboration of the Aristotelian *zoon politikon* which takes into account the process-regading and other-regarding preferences of individuals, besides including institutional settings in the analysis (Bowles and Gintis 2006, 173, 183). Gramsci's work is especially relevant to the question of microfoundations in all

these guises. In fact, he sought to provide microfoundations for Marxian economics and, in particular, he addressed the relationship between 'thin' and 'thick' descriptions of individuals' behavior.

(6) Methodological Approach

A note on the methodological approach followed in this thesis is in order before proceeding to review the chapter by chapter outline. This is a philologically accurate reconstruction of Gramsci's own effort to reconstruct Marxism. There is, inevitably, an element of reconstruction in what follows to the extent that I have sought to present Gramsci's work in a somewhat different and hopefully clearer way than it appears in the *Prison Notebooks*. After all, this is more than just an abridged version of the notebooks themselves. Hence the element of reconstruction. It is, however, a philologically accurate reconstruction in two senses. It is philologically accurate first and most obviously in that it goes back to the original Italian unabridged edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in order to bring out Gramsci's own project. The reconstruction of Gramsci's work ought to be carried out critically and responsibly (Buttigieg 1990, 80). This means giving up here the effort to make sense of every little item in the *Prison Notebooks*. It does not mean, however, that in order to safeguard the multiple uses to which Gramsci's work has been put, we should give up the search for the '"real"' Gramsci altogether (Buttigieg 1994, 104, 106, 108, 110). This is so for two reasons. First, Gramsci himself advocated the use of philology in order to recover what an author really meant. Bukharin and Achille Loria, therefore, were not criticized by Gramsci on pragmatic grounds only, but also because they had made a gross distortion of Marx's thought. Second, it is accepted here that it is not Gramsci himself who is being interpreted. Rather, to be precise, what is being interpreted is a text and the reconstruction that I am providing seeks to recover and maintain the meaning of the original text. If some meaning is invariably lost in translation, and even more so in reconstruction, this does not mean that *all* meaning is lost and that we thus can take any liberties we please with a text. But in what way can we consider the *Prison Notebooks* to be a text?

It is certainly a peculiar text that defies conventions. It has been suggested that the *Prison Notebooks* sprang from an open-ended project of study (Buttigieg 1994, 102). Certainly, they are an unfinished text that can be compared to a working construction site set up by an author who pushed the boundaries of analytical thought (Gerratana 1997, xvii, 71-2). It is thus claimed they are the quintessential multi-directional text, in which relationships between concepts are always in a fluid state, as appropriate for an 'inconclusive project' (Buttigieg 1990, 64, 66; 1994, 128). But it is not a text that indifferently sustains any interpretation/re-organization of it. After all, Buttigieg has undertaken the mammoth task of translating Gramsci *in the original,* unabridged edition. He is not providing just a more complete collection in which the notes are still re-ordered according to a new plan, be it a purely chronological order or some other, thematic, order. For all their fragmentary nature, in fact, the *Prison Notebooks* are not without some kind of internal structure, they are not simply an amorphous collection of notes in no particular order, or in an order that can be ignored. Some of this structure is given precisely by headings, which, it is argued here, show Gramsci's own organization of his work. These are: (a) note headings or rubrics, which group notes across several notebooks; (b) section headings or titles, which divide a notebook into sections and group blocks of notes within that given section of the notebook, be it a miscellaneous or thematic notebook; (c) the very existence of entire notebooks devoted to one theme, that is, thematic or 'special' notebooks. There is also a time-component to this structure. The Gerratana edition and Buttigieg translation provide the dates of compilation of different notebooks and blocs of notes. They also provide a clear indication of exactly which first drafts of notes went into the making of which second drafts. It is thus possible to trace how Gramsci's thought developed.

The reconstruction proposed here takes this development into account. Therefore, it is also philologically accurate in the second sense that it follows the '*leitmotiv* of developing thought' (*Il ritmo del pensiero in isviluppo*), as per recent philological readings that have borrowed this expression from Gramsci's own efforts at reconstructing Marxism and applied it to his own work (Cospito 2011).

This expression indicates a reading methodology that arguably applies to any body of thought within which development is taking place, but is especially appropriate for that peculiar text that are the *Prison Notebooks*. Simply put, it consists in identifying the main theme or *leitmotiv* which informs developments in an author's thought. It is especially appropriate for Gramsci's prison writings because these are an unfinished text which has survived in different drafts, all of which are somewhat provisional. Recognizing this allows us to remove apparent inconsistencies in Gramsci's thought. Gramsci proceeded by addressing a concept or a topic tentatively, reworking its definition across several notes. The evolution of his definition of the concept or topic might give rise to the impression that several possibly contradictory definitions of it coexist in Gramsci's work (Sassoon 2000, 45, 49). But in fact we ought to take into consideration the development of Gramsci's thought and privilege the later drafts as a point of arrival in his treatment. Furthermore, recognizing the unfinished and provisional nature of the *Prison Notebooks* is also a first step towards recovering the *leitmotiv* or theme of Gramsci's work. In fact, while privileging second drafts of notes over first drafts, for example, the approach followed here recognizes that even second drafts were unfinished and provisional. It thus privileges most of all the transition from one draft to the next. Indeed the theme that emerges as one follows Gramsci's thought as he elaborated a concept indicates what he meant better than the reading of later drafts on their own. It indicates the editorial/organizational direction in which Gramsci was heading.

The '*leitmotiv* of developing thought' within Gramsci's text is recovered in two ways. One relates to the micro-level of the text and the other to the macro-level, or, to use a pictorial metaphor, the two ways respectively relate to the finer lines and broader contours of the picture. Themes emerge when we approach Gramsci's text at the micro-level. Three operations are carried out on the text at this level: (i) follow the transition from first to second drafts of notes; (ii) follow the transition across notes with the same or similar headers, that is dealing with the same topic as identified by Gramsci; (iii) follow the transition across notes with similar topics even though with different note headers, so long as these were

gathered under same section headers, as with the concept of praxis, for example. These operations have been followed below in tracing developments in Gramsci's thought, only (iv) jumping across two notes that are not outwardly linked by any relationship other than the topic discussed while reconstructing Gramsci's thought as per the guidelines that emerged in the other operations (i-iii). This careful reading of individual notes and the tracing of the development of Gramsci's treatment of individual concepts across several notes does not necessarily mean that no structure emerges at this micro-level. The most basic argument to emerge from Francioni's reading of the notebooks and more recent developments like Frosini's reading is that there is an underlying 'structure' to the notebooks (Frosini 2011, 906). Certainly, it is not always possible to reconstruct a complete picture of Gramsci from single details, in the same way in which, as Gramsci himself pointed out, it is not *always* possible to reconstruct a whole animal from a single bone, in the manner in which Cuvier was said to have done (Buttigieg 1990, 81). Therefore this finer reading is complemented below by attention to the macro-level of Gramsci's text.

The second way in which I recover developments in Gramsci's thought, in fact, involves tracing the major contours of his work. It involves, in particular, showing how his work coalesced around a series of topics in the organizational/editorial process of gathering notes. It is here that the overarching unity and structure of the work emerges most clearly. Gramsci's project of reconstructing Marxism as a philosophy within which a special place was accorded to science has a clear parallel in the editorial process of organizing notes. We can clearly see the emergence of philosophy as a stand-alone topic gathered into two dedicated notebooks, devoted, respectively, to a critique of Croce's philosophy (Notebook 10) and to an introduction to philosophy that was meant to be a substitute for Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology* (Notebook 11). This gathering of philosophy into an overarching topic spanning two thematic notebooks is the editorial aspect of Gramsci's work that parallels his objective of reconstructing Marxism as a philosophy. For science, we can observe the definition of sub-topics within the overarching framework of Marxism

reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis. Thus natural science becomes a sub-topic within Notebook 11. Economics becomes a sub-topic within Notebook 10. Political science alone, which grows to occupy the largest space, becomes the subject of a stand-alone notebook (Notebook 13). This aspect of gathering notes into sub-topics is the editorial/organizational aspect of Gramsci's project to make a special place, within Marxism reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis, for natural science, economics and political science, with the latter acquiring a special place.

(7) Chapter Outline

The organization of the chapters reflects both the overarching argument of the thesis and the reading methodology adopted. The thesis itself is divided into two sections reflecting the overarching argument that Gramsci undertook to reconstruct Marxism as philosophy of praxis within which he reserved a special place for the various sciences. The first section addresses Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy, while the second addresses his theory of science. Each chapter reflects the methodology adopted in that it begins with a part devoted to tracing the development of the topic or concept addressed in that chapter. It traces both the broader contours of the development of Gramsci's thought and also some of the finer details within these broader contours. Thus, for example, the first parts of the chapter on philosophy trace the emergence of the topic of philosophy in the reconstruction of Marxism as a topic in its own right, distinct from, though still related to, the topics of intellectuals and hegemony. This shows the importance of philosophy in and of itself, and not just as the subject-matter of a cultural critique of philosophical production. The last approach to philosophy is still present in Gramsci's discussion of the influence of intellectuals' position upon philosophical production. But Gramsci's focus shifts from simply asserting that Marxism ought to be reconstructed as a philosophy to employing philosophical analysis to begin effecting this reconstruction. Within this broader theme one can trace a finer development. Gramsci's focus shifts from concern with the double revision of Marxism into materialist and idealist varieties, at the hand of various intellectual groups, towards writing a critique of

Croce's philosophy and an introduction to philosophy. The rest of the chapter offers a reconstruction of Gramsci's thought informed by the insights gained in the first part. All chapters follow this template, consisting of one or more parts devoted to tracing the '*leitmotiv* of developing thought', followed by a number of parts that reconstruct this thought as found in the thematic notebooks.

A single thread runs through the chapters in the first section. This is the concrete character of Gramsci's own understanding and elaboration of philosophy, particularly in comparison to Croce's. In the very definition of philosophy (chapter 1), as well as in the definition of such key philosophical concepts for Marxism as interpreted by Gramsci, namely, praxis (chapter 2) and human nature (chapter 3), he displayed an eminently concrete approach. Gramsci's discussion of philosophy, praxis and human nature is concrete and practical because, very much *unlike* Croce's discussion, it invests these abstract concepts with concrete social connotations, so that they can effectively serve as the foundation of a modern, non-deterministic, social science, as detailed in the next section. The whole first section, therefore, ultimately argues that we ought to take seriously Gramsci's own claim that Croce's philosophy represented a step back compared to Marx's. The latter had moved, in his elaboration, from abstract idealist philosophy to a concrete humanist philosophy that laid the foundations, as today is widely recognized, for the birth of modern social science. Gramsci sought to retrace this process in his discussion of philosophy, praxis and human nature.

The first chapter, in the section on philosophy, therefore starts precisely by considering Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy and its relation to the return to Labriola. The second chapter considers Gramsci's definition of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. For Gramsci, as for Labriola, this was the defining characteristic of Marxism, which set it apart from all previous philosophies. The centrality of praxis, or human practical activity, set it apart from idealism, with its emphasis upon ideas, as well as from materialism, with its emphasis upon matter or material forces. Gramsci also differentiated this philosophy from Croce's philosophy of the (human) spirit and Gentile's philosophy of the act, both of which had effectively retranslated Marx's concept

of praxis into a purely speculative, transcendental language. He supported, instead, a concrete understanding of human practical activity as the central category of Marxism. The third chapter considers Gramsci's treatment of human nature. This built upon Marx's definition of human nature as the ensemble of social relations. It explicitly added attention to the individual, however, in a manner that paved the way for the guarded adoption of various forms of individualism in social science. Gramsci in fact was favorable to individual-level explanations in social science for at least some applications and thought the concept of *homo oeconomicus* to be a necessary tool for economics.

The second section addresses Gramsci's theory of science, starting with natural science (chapter 4) and continuing with social sciences like economics (chapter 5) and political science (chapter 6). Two common and inter-related threads run through the second section. One is the demarcation or independence of one discipline from the other. Thus each chapter contains a part that details this issue, specifically addressing the independence of philosophy and economics from natural science and of political science from economics. This is a foundational discussion that seeks precisely to delimit the boundaries and legitimate subject matter of each scientific discipline. The other thread running through all chapters in the second section is the fundamentally social and historical character of each of these disciplines, starting with natural science. Gramsci understood both natural and social sciences, in fact, to be contextual, that is, fundamentally social and historical disciplines. In the case of economics and political science, Gramsci sought to differentiate these disciplines as understood by Marxism from a-historical, timeless, versions of them as exemplified, for example, in efforts to ground both economic and political behavior in a timeless human nature based entirely upon a biological understanding of human beings. Gramsci's historical understanding of human nature as seen in the third chapter informs instead his discussion of economics and political science.

The fourth chapter argues that Gramsci's chief concern in his notes on natural science was to deny that it could altogether replace philosophy. This was part of his rejection of interpretations of Marxism as a science of society, one

based upon the model of natural science in particular. He still put considerable stock in natural science, however, and did not fall into a relativist understanding of it as a purely cultural construction. On the contrary, he saw natural science as fallible but perfectible and as capable of transcending class and cultural divides. The very notion of objectivity and the possibility of attaining objective knowledge emerged in a historical process. Economics is addressed in the fifth chapter. An important component of Gramsci's discussion of economics is to mark its independence from natural science. Another important component involved taking a stance on debates central to the *methodenstreit*, asserting that the study of economic phenomena included both historical and abstract/deductive components. Both were scientific: the first by employing measurable and verifiable indicators; the second by following the model of an abstract/deductive science developed by neoclassical economics and deducing tendential laws from microfoundations in individual behavior. The latter approach has become firmly established in modern economics and Rational Choice theory. Political science is addressed in the sixth and final chapter. Just as he sought to demarcate economics from natural science, Gramsci sought to demarcate the field of politics from that of economics. He did so by emphasizing that political phenomena, though in principle explicable in terms of individuals' behavior, involved collective subjects or corporate actors. Indeed the central concern of political science in Gramsci's definition was precisely the constitution and interaction of collective subjects, human groups so constituted that their behavior seemed to spring from a collective will. As appropriate for an activist and political-party organizer, Gramsci conceived of these groups as more or less effective organizations capable of engaging in concerted collective action, with the political party as chief example.

1 – PHILOSOPHY, INTELLECTUALS AND HEGEMONY

This chapter reviews the role of philosophy in the *Notebooks* with particular reference to the relationship between philosophy and the theory of intellectuals and hegemony. Philologically, it argues that philosophy emerges as a topic of inquiry in its own right after Gramsci's early efforts to devise a work plan centered chiefly around a research project on intellectuals. This is especially important because philosophy is the first subject to be gathered into dedicated thematic notebooks, Notebooks 10 and 11. As such, it is also central to Gramsci's efforts to reconstruct Marxism after its double revision in combination with idealist and materialist philosophies. Marxism for Gramsci was a philosophy, and he insisted that it was a new philosophy distinct from both idealism and materialism. Philosophy thus became the starting point for his reconstruction of Marxism. Substantively, this chapter argues that Gramsci continued to have an interest in intellectuals and hegemony in his study of philosophy but that important qualifications to this point are in order. As philosophy emerged as a topic in its own right, Gramsci continued to be interested in the topic of intellectuals, particularly the relationship of intellectuals with the state and the masses, but this was chiefly in order to provide socio-historical explanations of the success of specific philosophical currents or trends, such as idealist and materialist revisions of Marxism. Philosophy retained a closer, instrumental, relationship with hegemony. Indeed, Gramsci's very understanding of philosophy, as a coherent, explicit and conscious system of thought, meant that it was the chief instrument of hegemonic (and counter-hegemonic) projects.

The argument developed in this chapter is directly relevant to three main points addressed by the thesis, as reviewed in the introduction. First, it is relevant to contemporary interpretations of Gramsci as a cultural and/or linguistic theorist. As far as Gramsci's discussion of the relationship between philosophy and intellectuals is concerned, in fact, this clearly shows that he endorsed and elaborated upon a socially grounded view of culture. This view of culture took

into account social structure, particularly social stratification, and emphasized the interaction between intellectuals and masses in the production of culture. It is a far cry from the view of culture as separate from and conceptually alternative to social structure, a view which can be argued to inform contemporary cultural studies drawing from Gramsci. Much the same can be said for that specific aspect of cultural production and interaction, language. Thus the argument developed here adds to two points that have been recently made concerning Gramsci's interest in language. The first point is that Gramsci's concept of hegemony as elaborated in the *Notebooks* is far from the concept of language hegemony familiar to him from his studies in linguistics, with its emphasis upon horizontal geographical relations between different areas, while it is closer to the concept of social stratification, emphasizing as it did vertical social relations between different social groups within a hierarchy (Schirru 2008b, 410). The second point is that Gramsci's notion that language involves a conception of the world is ultimately derived from Humboldt via Labriola, but that Gramsci adds to it the internal differentiation of the language community into a hierarchy of social groups (Schirru 2010, 115).

Second, the argument developed here is also relevant to Gramsci's relationship to his contemporaries, Croce and Labriola. As far as Gramsci's emphasis upon philosophy in the reconstruction of Marxism is concerned, this emerged from his reading of Labriola. It was associated, in Gramsci's elaboration, with a thorough critique of Croce, within what became a true settlement of accounts with his erstwhile philosophical conscience. The general argument that Gramsci was intellectually indebted to Croce should take quite seriously Gramsci's expressed desire to undertake this settlement of accounts as well as his desire to return to Labriola's interpretation of Marxism. This extends to the specific argument that Gramsci was indebted to Croce for his formulation of hegemony. Indeed it has been suggested that Croce's own ascendancy over Italian culture at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, based upon his activities through the journal *La Critica* and the publisher Laterza, provided a concrete precedent and template for Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Jacobitti 1980, 68).

Croce belonged, in his turn, to an Italian intellectual tradition privileging cultural struggle that harked back to Vincenzo Cuoco and Machiavelli, as well as to the activities of the Catholic Church (Jacobitti 1984, 101, 111-25), which Croce, Cuoco and Machiavelli all wanted to oppose through their visions of intellectual and moral reform. This is partly true. However, two qualifications will be raised below, quite apart from the fact that Croce did not theorize hegemony but exemplified it, whereas Gramsci explicitly undertook a theorization of hegemony. One qualification is that Croce was by no means the only source of inspiration for Gramsci. There was also, most importantly, Gramsci's own journalistic and political-party activity. Indeed, as first suggested by Togliatti, Gramsci undertook in the isolation of prison a theoretical elaboration of his own previous political activity (Frosini 2010, 18). This activity included a return to Labriola that in prison developed to include a planned Anti-Croce, a thorough settlement of accounts meant to contain Croce's influence on Gramsci's generation. Thus Croce himself became the target of Gramsci's own practice of (counter-)hegemony.

Third and last, the argument developed here is relevant to Gramsci's relationship to his contemporary intellectual movements, including in particular his relationship to Western Marxism. As far as Gramsci's emphasis upon philosophy is concerned, in fact, this did not stem from defeat and a withdrawal from active political concerns into purely theoretical ones. On the contrary, philosophy is in Gramsci's elaboration the necessary complement of active political work. The focus on philosophy does not bespeak defeat, but a sense of a necessary new departure. In particular, Gramsci's emphasis upon philosophy in the reconstruction of Marxism originated in efforts at ideological construction of the new party based on the victorious Bolshevik example. As far as the theory of intellectuals is concerned, to the extent that it continued to inform his discussion of philosophy, this included a socio-historical analysis of the reasons for the intellectual success of idealism (Croce) and the degeneration of Marxism into materialist combinations so devastatingly criticized by Croce. This was essentially a self-conscious reflection on Gramsci's part into the reasons for Croce's neoidealist hegemony in intellectual circles. It too thus had a concrete political

component. Also, it has parallels with Mannheim's analysis of intellectuals in knowledge production (Goldman 1994, 267), more than with Western Marxism. Most strikingly and importantly, it has marked parallels with Alvin Gouldner's analysis of the role of intellectuals in the elaboration of Marxism, particularly its emphasis upon the effect on Marxism of the nature of the social group that conceived it and shaped it (Gouldner 1985, 6). Only, in Gramsci's case, this analysis includes the double revision that Marxism suffered into critical and scientific, voluntaristic and deterministic varieties (Gouldner 1980, 32-51) or idealist and materialist variants. Gramsci in fact sees this double revision as arising not out of an initial inner tension in Marx's thought, as from the position of intellectual groups that subsequently elaborated Marxism. As far as the relationship between philosophy and hegemony is concerned, this involved a concrete political role for philosophy that Gramsci explicitly theorized, however briefly. In this sense too, finally, Gramsci's interest in philosophy was concrete and tied to political activity.

The chapter is divided into nine parts. The first three parts offer a philological reconstruction of Gramsci's growing interest in philosophy. They start with (1) the pre-prison antecedents which included both a sense that Labriola was important to the rise of theoretical Marxism in Italy and a sense that theory and philosophy were important for the construction of the new party. The return to Labriola was indeed first conceived as a theoretical effort that had a direct connection to party organization. (2) Philosophy, together with the criticism of Croce, progressively emerges as a subject in its own right in the reconstruction of Marxism following his arrest and the early projects to work on intellectuals. (3) And by the time Gramsci came to gather his earlier notes into thematic notebooks, his work plan had consolidated into drafting an Anti-Croce and a general introduction to philosophy. Both were linked to the return to Labriola. The next three parts consider the relationship between Gramsci's work on philosophy and his work on intellectuals, after the realignment in his work plans towards philosophy and the reconstruction of Marxism. (4) The study of intellectuals in conjunction with philosophy figured chiefly in socio-historical explanations of the

success of philosophical currents, be they orthodox materialist interpretations of Marxism, arising from the interaction between intellectuals and masses at a specific conjuncture, or (5) idealist philosophies or revisions of Marxism in semi-peripheral areas like Italy, or (6) discussions of the success of philosophical currents in general, arising from the interaction between intellectuals and masses. The last three parts consider the relationship between Gramsci's work on philosophy and his work on hegemony. Each part focuses on one aspect of philosophy as it pertains to hegemonic struggles. (7) Philosophy plays a key role in hegemony as it is an internally coherent system of thought, (8) that is also explicit and ought to be externally coherent with the activity of a group and, finally, (9) it is also a fundamentally conscious form of thought.

1.1 – The Development of the Notes on Philosophy I: Pre-Prison Antecedents

The references that Gramsci made to Marx in the *Notebooks* differ from those that he made in his pre-prison writings. The latter were mostly political polemics in which Marx figured in support of one or another specific argument that Gramsci was temporarily engaged in. It was only after his imprisonment that Gramsci undertook a concerted effort to reconstruct Marx's thought and in this effort he turned to the 'philosopher Marx' (Izzo 2008, 553, 566). There are nevertheless some important antecedents to this reconstruction in the pre-prison years. One such antecedent is the emphasis on philosophy or theory for a correct understanding of Marxism in a number of pre-prison writings and in the planning of party political activities, which included a certain emphasis upon theory. Another antecedent is the significance of the figure of Labriola in relation to this effort to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy or theory of history. In prison Gramsci came to conceive of an Anti-Croce that was also a return to Labriola. This critical work was meant to be a settling of accounts with his erstwhile philosophical conscience. It engaged the master of idealist philosophy in Italy but also proposed a rediscovery of his mentor and true founder of theoretical Marxism in Italy, Labriola. There is no indication that these two central aspects of

Gramsci's philosophical reflection in the *Notebooks* were linked before his imprisonment. Nevertheless, they were both present.

Before considering these antecedents it is important however to consider the origins of theoretical Marxism in Italy. There is a certain irony in the fact that around one year after Gramsci's death Croce published a short work by the title *Come Nacque e Come Morì il Marxismo Teorico in Italia (1895-1900)* recalling his and Labriola's part in the birth and death of theoretical Marxism in Italy. Italian Socialism had borrowed Marx's work chiefly for symbolic political purposes and, despite a few exceptions, had not had with it any theoretical engagement worthy of notice. Labriola had been the most notable exception (Bravo 2007, 111-2). Thundering against socialist leaders like Filippo Turati and Claudio Treves, as well as deterministic interpreters of Marx such as Achille Loria, Labriola – a philosophy professor at Rome university – had emphasized that Marxism was a unique new philosophy that had degenerated in odd combinations with materialism such as Loria's. The young Croce met Labriola while in Rome and came under his influence for a while, collaborating on Labriola's project to put the study of Marxism in Italy on a serious footing (Jacobitti 1975, 305, 308; 1981, 62, 69). It is possible indeed to speak of a Marxist phase of Croce's work (Tuozzolo 2008, 11), though this was but short-lived and left a trace only in the importance that Croce attached to the economy (Caserta 1983, 141, 146). Croce in fact soon fell out with his mentor and contributed to open the 'crisis of Marxism'. The essays that he wrote on Marxism soon became mostly critical. They were to be collected in a volume by the title *Historical Materialism and Marxian Economics* that would enjoy a great editorial success. Croce himself moved on to develop a neoidealist philosophy that harked back to Hegel and Vico. This had an enormous success helped also by Croce's editorial activities including his review *La Critica* (Jacobitti 1980, 72-4; 1981, 88-9). For Croce, the brief rise of theoretical Marxism was a closed chapter in Italian intellectual history already by 1900.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Labriola and his interpretation of Marxism were completely forgotten after his death in 1904 and Croce's

subsequent rise to fame and development of a full-blown neoidealist philosophy. Certainly, Labriola continued to be read. The young Gramsci, for one, had read Labriola by 1916-17. By then he was acquainted with the latter's essays on *The Materialist Conception of History* and on *Socialism and Philosophy* (Davidson 1977, 80, 105). In 1918, Gramsci was also probably responsible for the publication of some notable work by Labriola in a Socialist newspaper (Catone 1994, 248). There is also at least one reference to Labriola in Gramsci's polemics with other Socialists. Together, they indicate that already from an early stage Gramsci had an appreciation of the theoretical seriousness of Labriola compared both to Socialist leaders and other early Marxist theoreticians in Italy. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Labriola was far overshadowed by Croce in Gramsci's intellectual formation, as in that of many Italians. If Gramsci read Labriola before he read Marx he also read Croce, as well as Sorel and Bergson, before he read Marx and referred to them more often than he referred to Labriola (Catone 1994, 250).

In the 1920s, however, there began a period of rediscovery of Labriola. Young Socialists like Lelio Basso and Rodolfo Mondolfo became interested in re-reading Labriola's work. So too did Communists like Gramsci, soon to be at the head of the newly founded party. Indeed it is possible to speak of a generalized 'return to Labriola' in the culture of the Italian left in the 1920s (Garin 1983, 160; Catone 1994, 252-4). In the case of Gramsci this return was tied to the process of building up the new party into a Bolshevik mould. Part of the objective was to construct a Marxist tradition and claim Labriola for the Communist camp against Socialist efforts at appropriating him (Bidussa 1988, 232-9). The publication of the surviving Labriola-Engels correspondence was probably undertaken with this goal in mind and assigned to Angelo Tasca, who was arguably as committed as Gramsci, if not more, to the definition of a clear political program for the *Ordine Nuovo* group of which they were part (Bidussa 2008, 299-309). But there was undoubtedly a genuine theoretical interest in Labriola on Gramsci's part, which went hand in hand with what can be described as an hegemonic project in the construction of the new party. Gramsci planned a special issue of the *Ordine*

Nuovo dedicated to Labriola (Catone 1994, 254). Bolshevization, in fact, involved a great emphasis on theoretical efforts in the construction of the new party (Paggi 1984, 427-9, 432-6) and in this form affetcted the return to Labriola. It also involved a rediscovery of national Marxist traditions whereby the French were encouraged to rediscover Lafargue and Guesde, Italians were encouraged to rediscover Labriola, etc. A Soviet journal adopting this approach devoted specific attention both to Labriola and to philosophy in the reconstruction of Marxism (Bidussa 1988, 243-4; Catone 1994, 254-6). Gramsci extended this 'translation' or appropriation of Marxism in national languages/traditions to Bolshevik policies such as the worker-peasant alliance. The essay on the Southern Question that he was working on just before his arrest in 1926 undertook precisely this 'translation'. It also began to address the role of intellectuals vis-à-vis the peasant masses of the South and in this context Gramsci began elaborating a critique of Croce's hegemonic function in Italian culture (Gramsci 1974, 149-50).

1.2 – The Development of the Notes on Philosophy II: the Miscellaneous Notebooks

It was only in the course of writing up the *Notebooks* that Gramsci developed the return to Labriola as an extension of the latter's idea that Marxism ought to be reconstructed as a philosophy and to link this reconstruction to the criticism of Croce. Initially, however, the greatest focus was on intellectuals and hegemony. Indeed it has been suggested that the theory of intellectuals, together with the theory of hegemony that complements it, is the main 'focus' of the *Notebooks* (Vacca 2008, 92, 99). This is true to the extent to which, chronologically, Gramsci first showed an interest in questions relating to intellectuals and hegemony that continued in the *Notebooks* the focus of the essay on the Southern Question (Frosini 2003, 51). This focus would arguably continue to inform what he wrote in the *Notebooks*. However, philosophy would ultimately emerge as a topic in its own right from his initial reflections on intellectuals and hegemony, including in particular Croce's hegemony over Italian culture. The three strands that can be identified as driving Gramsci's effective work in prison through to 1930 include: first, 'Americanism and Fordism'; second, the 'Theory and History of

Historiography', which refers both to a work by Croce with this name and, more in general, to the philosophy or theory of history; third, it included the theory of intellectuals. At this early stage the theory of intellectuals acted as an overarching 'framework' for the rest of Gramsci's work (Frosini 2011, 911-2).

Philosophy as a topic in its own right would however progressively emerge from this framework as Gramsci's work took shape in the first miscellaneous notebooks. Gramsci's work-plans as well as the notes that he effectively took grew in scope and diversity until August 1931, when he wrote that he no longer had a work plan, giving the example of his work on intellectuals as a case in point (Frosini 2003, 30, 59-60). This was arguably a crisis in Gramsci's prison work. Until then, despite the expansion in the topics that he wrote on, the overarching topic of intellectuals continued to act as leitmotiv or framework through Notebooks 1, 3 and 5 (Francioni 1984, 70-6). But for a time at least philosophy would emerge as a topic in its own right that would act as the focus of Gramsci's attention. Already in May 1930 Gramsci inaugurated a new notebook, Notebook 4, in which a substantial section was marked off by the title 'Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism. First Series'. This was unprecedented in Gramsci's miscellaneous notebooks, in which topics had been indicated by the rubric/title of the individual note only and the notes and topics were mixed in no particular order. Together with the sheer quantity of notes in this section (§§1-48), it indicates that at a certain point in time Gramsci had decided to focus on philosophy – and not just on intellectuals anymore – as an overarching framework for a substantial part of his work.

Gramsci continued to write on intellectuals, of course. For example, Notebook 4 contains three important notes (§§49-51) which outline his theory of intellectuals and would be copied in Notebook 12. But the only other headers in the miscellaneous notebooks, demarcating large sections of them to be devoted to a specific topic, continued the emphasis upon philosophy. They are the 'Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism. Second Series' in Notebook 7 (§§1-48) and the 'Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism. Third Series' in Notebook 8 (§§166-240). Gramsci was not entirely consistent in reserving this

last section for notes on philosophy. There is one note with the rubric ‘Past and Present’ (§180) and two on intellectuals (§§187-8), for example, as well as a few other notes on assorted topics. Nevertheless, even here – in the ‘Third Series’ – the overwhelming majority of notes focus on philosophical topics. Most importantly, the ‘Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism.’ becomes the subject of a sustained attention in three notebooks. The three successive ‘Series’ are a clear sign of a coherent project taking shape that united numerous notes and was continued over time.

From the very beginning, the project takes shape as a reconstruction of Marxism based on Labriola’s interpretation that Marxism was a philosophy. One note sketches out the entire project and links it both to Labriola’s views on philosophy and to editorial initiatives involving Labriola precisely like those that Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* group had planned and began to undertake in the 1920s. In a note that has been dated between June and July 1930, that is, approximately coinciding with the beginning of the ‘First Series’ in Notebook 4, Gramsci made clear the link with the editorial initiatives preceding his arrest. ‘On Antonio Labriola: an objective, systematic summary account of his publications on historical materialism to replace the volumes that are out of print and that the family does not reprint; this work would be the *beginning of an effort to put back into circulation Labriola’s philosophical views*, which are little known outside a restricted circle.’ (3§31: PN, 30, my emphasis) This effort ‘to put back into circulation Labriola’s philosophical views’ should have included not only the reprinting of Labriola’s own work but also a sustained critical engagement with this work. ‘The analytical and systematic treatment of Labriola’s thought *could constitute the philosophical section of periodicals* modeled on *La Voce*, *Leonardo (O.[rdine] N.[uovo])*, and it could provide material for the regular sections for at least six months or a year.’ (PN, 31, my emphasis) Mindful perhaps of the attention that Labriola had received in Soviet periodicals Gramsci also pointed to the need for an international bibliography: ‘An “international” bibliography on Labriola (*Neue Zeit*, etc.) also needs to be compiled.’ (PN, 31)

The ‘First Series’ takes up these points and develops them in the direction of including Croce among revisionists of Marxism. It also explicitly connects the critique of Croce with the return to Labriola and the reconstruction of Marxism. The very first note in the ‘First Series’ sets out what it would take ‘to study a conception of the world that has never been systematically expounded by its author-thinker’ (4§1: PN, 137). The reference is to Marx, whose name is explicitly made on the following page (PN, 138) and whose thought should be differentiated from Engels’ (PN, 138-9). Already here Gramsci interprets Marxism as ‘a conception of the world’, that is, a *Weltanschaung* or philosophy. This is made clear soon after. Under the rubric ‘Two aspects of Marxism’ Gramsci reflects on the pros and cons, as well as the reasons why, Marxism had been subsumed under either materialism or idealism. He contrasts these interpretations with Labriola’s:

> I believe Antonio Labriola’s position should be reevaluated. Why? Marxism has undergone a double revision; that is, it has given rise to a double combination. On the one hand, some of its elements have been explicitly or implicitly absorbed by certain *idealist currents (Croce, Sorel, Bergson, etc., the pragmatists, etc.)*; on the other hand, the “official” Marxists, anxious to find a philosophy that comprised Marxism, have found it in the modern derivations of *vulgar philosophical materialism or even in idealistic currents like Kantianism* (Max Adler). *Labriola is differentiated from both of these currents by his affirmation that Marxism is itself an independent and original philosophy*. This is the direction in which one must work, resuming and developing Labriola’s position. (4§3: PN, 140, my emphases)

The second draft of this note is significantly reworked, but it maintained the emphasis upon Labriola’s interpretation of Marxism as a philosophy. If anything, it underlined it even more. The reference to ‘Marxism’ has been replaced by ‘philosophy of praxis’ and Labriola is said to be differentiated by his assertion ‘that the philosophy of praxis is an independent and original philosophy, which has within itself the elements of a further development to become from an interpretation of history a general philosophy.’ (16§9: QC, 1855) What has completely disappeared from the second draft of this note is the emphasis on idealism and materialism in its title, which is now ‘Some problems for the study of the development of the philosophy of praxis.’

The change occurred in the course of Gramsci's work on the three 'Series'. The emphasis upon philosophy and the return to Labriola continued to inform Gramsci's work. What happened in the process of drafting the three 'Series' is that the contrast between materialism and idealism came to be subsumed under work for a critique of Croce and a general introduction to philosophy. Numerous notes on Bukharin and his orthodox materialist interpretation of Marxism were accompanied by some notes on Croce already in the 'First Series', but Croce's weight seems to grow through the 'Second' and 'Third Series' (Francioni 1987, 33-4). More importantly, two new rubrics appear by the time that Gramsci was working on the 'Third Series': 'Points for an essay on Croce' and 'Introduction to the study of philosophy'. At this stage the notes headed 'Points for an essay on Croce' contain mainly a critique of the latter's historiographical writings and the associated concept of ethico-political history (Frosini 2003, 69), which Gramsci interpreted as nothing but a reformulation of the concept of hegemony. But towards the end of the 'Third Series' Gramsci gave a clear indication that a critical study of Croce was to become a standalone topic in its own right and absorb within itself the contrast between idealism and materialism, with discussion of the latter continuing, but relegated to a second, implicit, plane:

> All historicist theories of a speculative character have to be reexamined and criticized. A new *Anti-Dühring* needs to be written from this point of view, and it could be an Anti-Croce, for it would recapitulate not only the polemic against speculative philosophy but also, implicitly, the polemic against positivism and mechanistic theories—degenerations of the philosophy of praxis (8§235: PN, 378)

Clearly Gramsci's concern with Croce's speculative philosophy had come to eclipse his concern with the double revision of Marxism at the hand of idealist and materialist interpreters.

1.3 – The Development of the Notes on Philosophy III: the Thematic Notebooks

The redrafting of earlier notes into thematic notebooks confirms the trends we have seen at work in the miscellaneous notebooks. One of these trends is the *relative* loss of interest in the topic of intellectuals. Notebook 12, the thematic

notebook on intellectuals, began with copying the three notes from Notebook 4, but did not go past this stage and was left mostly blank. Many of the notes on intellectuals that Gramsci had jotted down in other notebooks were not taken up again and would remain single draft notes. This was probably due both to the size of the task of redrafting earlier notes, particularly those on intellectuals, and also to the 'greater interest' for new themes (Francioni 1984, 85). Philosophy was the main new theme and the other trend that is important here concerns philosophy itself. The new thematic notebooks confirm in fact the shift away from the emphasis upon the contrast between idealism and materialism in the study of philosophy, in favor of a work on Croce that subsumed the criticism of materialist as well as idealist degenerations of Marxism, followed by a work of introduction to philosophy. Thus the two rubrics that appeared at the end of the 'Third Series' would develop into two thematic notebooks: Notebook 10, on Croce's philosophy, and Notebook 11, on a general introduction to philosophy. To these we must now turn in order to dispel the misunderstanding that Gramsci continued to approach the study of philosophy chiefly in terms of the idealism-materialism duality as represented by Croce and Bukharin or religion and science respectively (Finocchiaro 1988, passim, chs.1-4) or that indeed the very 'philosophical coherence' of the *Notebooks* resides in this approach to the study of Marxism (Kanoussi 1999, 353, 357-60). On the contrary, Gramsci's interest had shifted towards writing an Anti-Croce and an introduction to philosophy. Bukharin is entirely subsumed under the latter, as an example of how *not* to write a work of introduction to Marxist theory/philosophy, while Labriola continues to be the main referent for the interpretation of Marxism as a philosophy, rather than a scientistic sociology, as interpreted by Bukharin.

Notebook 10 testifies to this shift very clearly, despite some peculiarities in its composition. It was titled by Gramsci 'Introduction to Croce's philosophy', clearly marking the new interest. Peculiarities in its composition suggest that it might be a unique hybrid between a thematic notebook and a miscellaneous one. In fact, although it begun as a thematic notebook, it might well have turned into a fourth installment of the 'Series' on philosophy (Francioni 1984, 107-8; 1987,

37). This is suggested both by the fact that it contains many first-draft notes, far more than other thematic notebooks, which are generally simply containers for redrafted earlier notes, as well as by the fact that a certain number of these new notes are headed by the rubric title 'Introduction to the study of philosophy'. This is just as in the 'Third Series' and it suggests that this last concern had began to 'invade', as it were, the notebook first begun to be devoted only to the critique of Croce's philosophy. Be that as it may, this does not invalidate the argument being proposed here. Throughout the writing of Notebook 10 Gramsci continued to take notes on Croce under the rubric 'Points for an Essay on Croce', as well as to copy and organize notes on Croce that he had previously written in the three 'Series' in Notebooks 4, 7 and 8 (cf. the lengthy note 10ii§41, divided into xvi points). The very last notes (10ii§58-9, §61) are on Croce, showing without doubt that Gramsci continued to have a keen interest in the planned Anti-Croce.

This interest was inextricably linked to the reconstruction of Marxism and the return to Labriola. The role of the Anti-Croce in the reconstruction of Marxism is elaborated at length in a note in the first part of the notebook. Here Gramsci begins by doubting that Croce's encounter with Marxism had left no trace in his philosophy (10i§11: QC, 1232). On the contrary, Gramsci suggests a research that 'would be of immense historical and intellectual significance in the present epoch' involving precisely Croce's participation in the process of reception of theoretical Marxism in Italy. Gramsci hypothesized that 'just like the philosophy of praxis has been the translation of Hegelianism into historicist language, so Croce's philosophy is to a great extent a retranslation into speculative language of the realistic historicism of the philosophy of praxis.' (QC, 1233) Gramsci then explicitly made a link to the reconstruction of Marxism and the return to Labriola by recalling an article that he had penned in 1917, as an introduction to a reprint of a work by Croce. In this article he had suggested that 'just like Hegelianism had been the premise of the philosophy of praxis in the nineteenth century … so Crocean philosophy could be the premise for a resumption of the philosophy of praxis in our own time, for our generations.' (QC, 1233) Here Gramsci frankly admits that in his youth he had been

‘tendentially rather Crocean’ and that his earlier formulation had lacked in precision. But he now takes up again the earlier project with the explicit desire to settle accounts with his erstwhile philosophical conscience: ‘it is necessary to redo for Croce’s philosophical conception the same reduction that the first theorists of the philosophy of praxis have done for the Hegelian conception. This is the only historically fruitful manner of determining an adequate resumption of the philosophy of praxis.’ (QC, 1233) Thus now being the heirs to idealist philosophy involves a settling of accounts and reducing it to the status that pertains to it: ‘it is necessary to settle accounts with Croce’s philosophy, that is for us Italians to become the heirs of classical German philosophy means to become the heirs of Crocean philosophy’. (QC, 1234) Croce himself had been fighting off Marxism with incredible doggedness precisely to avoid this settling of accounts.

> It is necessary instead to come to this settling of accounts, in the broadest and deepest possible manner. A work of this kind, an Anti-Croce which in the modern cultural atmosphere could have the same significance and importance that the *Anti-Dühring* had for the generation preceding the world war, would deserve that an entire group of men [devote to it] ten years of work. (QC, 1234)

Notebook 11 also testifies to Gramsci’s shift in interest away from the contrast between idealism and materialism. It was titled by the editors ‘Introduction to the study of philosophy’, just like the rubric title that appears in the ‘Third Series’, to mark the other new direction in Gramsci’s research. Peculiarities in its composition suggest however that the title Gramsci intended for this notebook was a slightly different one. In fact, Gramsci seems initially to have left the first ten pages blank for a summary and/or table of contents, a practice he often used in other notebooks. Only later, as he reached the very end of the notebook, he was forced to invade the beginning section with a number of miscellaneous notes that continue the very last section of the notebook (Francioni 1984, 109-10; 1987, 43-4). One consequence of this is that the title to be found on the eleventh page was probably initially meant by Gramsci as a title for the entire notebook. It reads ‘Notes for an introduction and start to the study of philosophy and of the history of culture’. This does not invalidate the argument being proposed here, namely, that Gramsci’s interest had focused on writing an

introduction to the study of philosophy. It also adds to substantive considerations in giving the lengthy note that immediately follows this title (§12) an especially important role. This note is all focused upon defining the purpose of an introduction to the study of philosophy and it naturally serves as an introduction to the entire notebook. Its contents too confirm Gramsci's continued interest in writing an introduction to the study of philosophy.

Two other considerations pertaining to Notebook 11 ought to be addressed in this context. They involve two important figures in the Notebooks – Bukharin and Labriola. As far as Bukharin is concerned, one ought to resist the temptation of interpreting the entire notebook as built around a critique of his work. Some commentators have suggested that Gramsci was effectively working at an 'Anti-Bukharin' (Martinelli 2001, 62, 67; Catone 2008) by analogy with his planned Anti-Croce. This suggestion is unfounded. For one thing, there is no explicit reference to an Anti-Bukharin as there is to the Anti-Croce and, as Gramsci added, to an Anti-Gentile. For another thing, the suggestion flies in the face of Gramsci's organization of Notebook 11 as an introduction to philosophy, both in its title and in its introductory note (§12). More careful commentators have suggested that Notebook 11 does not actually contain an independent introduction to philosophy but is rather concerned with 'a sustained critique of Bukharin's positions' because, even though Gramsci might have aimed at producing a general introduction to philosophy, he effectively stopped at the critique of Bukharin (Thomas 2009, 114, 119-20, 298). This is only partly true since somewhat less than half of the notebook is taken up by the critique of Bukharin. The majority of notes do not deal with Bukharin at all. Most importantly, the fact remains that in the process of writing his notes, Gramsci had changed his emphasis away from a philosophical critique of materialism in Bukharin – if ever he wanted to write one – and towards subsuming his work under the topic of an introduction to philosophy.

In fact, not only is Notebook 11 not built around Bukharin, but Bukharin's work is not addressed chiefly as a representative of materialism to be contrasted with Croce as a representative of idealism. Rather, Gramsci's interest in Bukharin

is chiefly as a representative of an effort at popularization. This was probably there all along. Gramsci had used Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology* as a fundamental text in the party school that he ran in 1925 and he must naturally have associated this text with popularization and teaching. The very first note explicitly addressing Bukharin's work in the 'First Series' faults it for its failure to address philosophy and at the same time highlights its purpose as an introductory work (4§13: PN, 154). This note will be copied to Notebook 11, showing that Gramsci still valued the fundamental criticism he had first aimed at Bukharin's work and the importance that philosophy had in this criticism:

> One of the preliminary observations [to be made against Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology*] is this: that the title does not correspond to the content of the book. "Theory of the philosophy of praxis" should mean the coherent and logical arrangement of the philosophical concepts which are variously known under the name of philosophy of praxis (and which very often are spurious, of extraneous derivation and as such should be criticized and exposed). The first chapters should have dealt with the questions: *What is philosophy? Is a conception of the world a philosophy? How has philosophy been conceived until now? Does the philosophy of praxis alter that conception? … The answer to these and other questions constitute the "theory" of the philosophy of praxis*. (11§26: QC, 1431, my emphasis).

In Notebook 11 a change in organization coincides with an increased emphasis upon the pedagogical aspect of philosophy. In the opening note (§12) Gramsci has already addressed the question 'What is philosophy?' emphasizing its pedagogical aspect by suggesting that it is at least in part a critique of common sense (as addressed in part 1.7 below). Thus in this notebook the first note in the section on Bukharin (§13), immediately following the note on philosophy and the purposes of an introduction to philosophy (§12), faults Bukharin's work for its failure to critique common sense. The new emphasis upon the introduction to philosophy, and on philosophy as a critique of common sense, thus led Gramsci to criticize Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology* chiefly for its failure to address common sense. The critique of materialism in Bukharin's work is now subsumed under this pedagogical consideration, that is, rather than criticizing common sense, with its materialistic proclivities, Bukharin's work ended up participating in it.

As far as Labriola is concerned, Gramsci continued to conceive of Marxism as first of all a philosophy, following Labriola's position. In fact, the theme that Marxism ought to be developed as an original and independent philosophy was not related to Rosa Luxemburg (Kanoussi 2010, 43, 58), but to the return to Labriola. And when Gramsci cites Luxemburg at the end of Notebook 11 (§70) it is to explain the failed reception of Labriola's approach to the reconstruction of Marxism. This is in fact a rewriting of an earlier note (3§31), in which Gramsci once again makes the link with the editorial initiatives preceding his arrest in reiterating the need to circulate Labriola's philosophical views. He also once again focused but also expanded upon, the concrete socio-historical reasons fro Labriola's lack of success.

> Why did Labriola and his set-up of the philosophical problem have had so little fortune? On this issue we can recall what Rosa [Luxemburg] wrote regarding critical economics and its highest problems: in the romantic period of struggle, in the popular *Sturm und Drang*, all interest is focused on the most immediate weapons, on tactical problems, on [daily] politics and [only] on the minor cultural problems in the philosophical field. But from the moment in which a subaltern group becomes autonomous and hegemonic, bringing into being a new type of State, the need is concretely raised of creating a new intellectual and moral order, that is, a new type of society, and thus the need [is raised too] of elaborating the more universal concepts, the most refined and decisive ideological weapons. Here is the reason to circulate once again Antonio Labriola['s work] and to assert his own approach to the philosophical question (11§70: QC, 1508-9).

This addition in the later note is notable chiefly for two reasons. One is that Gramsci explains Labriola's failed reception or lack of fortune entirely by socio-historical reasons, rather than theoretical merits. The second is that the theoretical merits are reasserted and if anything further supported by the socio-historical reasons, as the struggle for hegemony adds another reason yet to circulate once again his views on philosophy. There is thus no reversal of opinion on Labriola in Notebook 11. This could be suggested on the basis of the fact that the opening note of this notebook is critical of Labriola. One might thus think that Gramsci's position on Labriola had changed (Mastroianni 1991, 497-8). In fact, the note might have been added later, as Gramsci ran out of space at the very end of the notebook. Most importantly, substantive reasons add weight to this consideration and suggest that the first note of Notebook 11 does not constitute a keynote, as it

were, for Gramsci's overall appraisal of Labriola (Francioni 1992b, 613-4). In particular, Gramsci undoubtedly continued to share Labriola's interpretation of Marxism as first and foremost a philosophy or theory of history, whatever else he thought about his other views.

1.4 – Philosophy and Intellectuals I: The Double Revision of Marxism

Philosophy emerged in the course of Gramsci's work as a topic in its own right, quite distinct from the study of culture, including even the study of intellectuals that had been so prominent in the first or earliest notebooks. However, Gramsci's reflections on philosophy continued to be informed by considerations relating to culture and intellectuals to some extent. But two important points concerning the continued importance of culture and in particular intellectuals will be emphasized in this and the next two chapter parts. First, to the extent that these topics continued to inform Gramsci's reflections on philosophy, they did so in a clearly delimited way. They only concerned the socio-historical explanation of the reasons for the lack of fortune (or otherwise) of a certain philosophical movement. As such, they were quite distinct from the purely theoretical discussion and elaboration of philosophical and scientific concepts which constitutes the central preoccupation of the 'philosophical notebooks'. Second, it is important to stress that Gramsci's discussion of intellectuals in this delimited context involves what is essentially a strongly structural/institutional socio-historical explanation. Gramsci's conception of culture, in fact, did not involve a disembodied notion of culture seen as separate from, or even over and above, social structure. Instead, cultural practices were always embedded, in Gramsci's discussion, within social structures and institutions. The discussion of intellectual groups and their relationship to other social groups, to society at large and to the state, in influencing the fortunes of philosophical movements, clearly illustrates this point.

Both points emerge quite starkly in Gramsci's redrafting of the note on 'Two aspects of Marxism' (4§3) into the longer and more elaborate note 'Some problems for the study of the development of the philosophy of praxis' (16§9). The location of this note testifies to the delimitation of the topic it addresses to a

particular context, that of Notebook 16, specifically devoted by Gramsci to 'Cultural Topics' related to, but distinct from, his now clearer focus on philosophy. This is also consistent with Gramsci's shift away from the emphasis upon the idealism-materialism contrast in his philosophical notes. Demoted philosophically, the question is retained in a cultural context in which Gramsci adds, compared to the earlier note, a socio-historical explanation for this double revision involving intellectuals and their relationship to the masses. Marxism, Gramsci explains at the beginning of this note, has been 'a moment of modern culture'. Its contribution to a number of intellectual currents through its double revision is now explained with reference to intellectuals:

> It can be seen, in general, that the currents which have attempted to combine the philosophy of praxis with idealist elements [*tendenze*] are for the most part [made up] of "pure" intellectuals, whereas those which constituted the orthodoxy were [made up] of intellectual personalities more markedly given to practical activity and therefore more [closely] tied … to the great popular masses …. This distinction has great importance. The "pure" intellectuals, as elaborators of the more extensive ideologies of the dominant classes, as leaders of the intellectual groups of their countries, could not avoid making use of at least some elements of the philosophy of praxis … to furnish new weapons to the arsenal of the social group to which they were tied. On the other hand the orthodox tendency found itself fighting the most diffuse ideology among popular masses, religious transcendentalism, and it thought it could overcome it only with the crudest and most banal materialism, which itself was a not indifferent stratification of common sense, kept alive, more than one would tend to believe, by religion itself (16§9: QC, 1855)

The following discussion of the role of intellectuals in the double revision illustrates the structural and institutional considerations that informed Gramsci's theory of intellectuals. A classic example of the first process, involving 'pure' intellectuals, is Croce's reduction of the philosophy of praxis to an empirical canon of historical research, but there are also many unacknowledged borrowings and combinations, in Sorel, bergsonism and pragmatism (QC, 1856). The second process, involving 'practical' intellectuals in producing the combination with materialism, is the most interesting for Gramsci, however. Citing another point made by Luxemburg, analogous to the one he applied to Labriola, Gramsci suggests that the founders of the new philosophy – Marx and Engels – were considerably ahead of their time, as they effectively set up a theoretical arsenal with anachronistic weapons that were of no use to the representatives of the

orthodox tendency (QC, 1857). The latter, as we have seen in the passage above, faced chiefly the task to educate the masses. The point is reiterated and expanded upon by Gramsci:

> One of the historical reasons seems to be that the philosophy of praxis has had to ally itself with extraneous tendencies in order to fight the residues of the precapitalist world among popular masses, especially on the religious terrain. The philosophy of praxis had two tasks: to fight modern ideologies in their most refined form, *to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals*, and to educate the popular masses, whose culture was medieval. This second task, which was fundamental, given the character of the new philosophy, absorbed all the forces, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively (QC, 1857-8, my emphasis).

The point introduced in this passage is that the philosophy of praxis, in fighting modern ideologies in their most advanced forms, would have been able to constitute 'its own group of independent intellectuals'.

This, Gramsci goes on to explain, is an extremely difficult task. Following a brief review of movements for intellectual and moral reform, most notably the Reformation and the Enlightenment, Gramsci sought to explain Erasmus' observation, cited by Croce, that wherever Luther triumphed higher studies were doomed. This was, effectively, because of the entire concentration of new movements on the more immediate tasks of communicating with the masses. 'The Lutheran reform and Calvinism gave rise to a vast national-popular movement where they spread and only in successive periods [they gave rise] to a superior culture'. (QC, 1859) Gramsci somewhat dubiously went on to argue that the same was true for the Enlightenment, which was 'a great intellectual and moral reform of the French people, more complete than the German Lutheran one, because it embraced also the great popular masses in the countryside' (QC, 1859) and it too was not accompanied by 'an immediate flowering of high culture, other than for political science in the positive science of [legal] right' (QC, 1859-60). So too for the philosophy of praxis, 'which is still going through its popular phase' (QC, 1860). The most difficult task in these conditions is precisely to give rise to and foster an independent group of (high) intellectuals, since

> to generate a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing, it demands a lengthy process, with actions and reactions, with adherences and dissolutions and

> very numerous and complex new formations: it is the conception of a subaltern social group, without historical initiative, which continuously enlarges itself, but disorganically, and without being able to move past a certain qualitative level which is always this side of ownership of the state, of the real exercise of hegemony on the entire society which alone permits a certain organic equilibrium in the development of the intellectual group (QC, 1860-1).

Yet generating a group of independent intellectuals who are still tied/allied to the new social group and who seek to change its subaltern status is indispensable. Considerations such as the structural location of high intellectuals, not linked to the people but rather 'the expression of traditional intermediate classes' affected their loyalty to popular causes, which they tended to desert in difficult times. It also affected their tendency to subject the philosophy of praxis to a 'systematic revision', rather than encouraging its own autonomous development as a new and original philosophy (QC, 1862-3).

1.5 – Philosophy and Intellectuals II: the Success of Idealism

Another long note similarly reflects both points that we have just seen concerning the continued importance of culture and in particular intellectuals in Gramsci's reflections on philosophy. These two points are: that it was delimited to the explanation of the lack of fortune (or otherwise) of intellectual currents; and that this was essentially a structural/institutional socio-historical explanation reflecting a view of cultural practices as embedded in society. As for the first point, the note (10§61) focuses on the success of idealism, including Crocean idealism, and was added by Gramsci at the very end of Notebook 10. It was obtained by redrafting two notes from Notebook 1 (1§150, 1§151) that focus on the 'Conception of the state according to the function of social classes' and on the 'Historical relationship between the modern French state born from the Revolution and the other modern European States'. These two notes, merged and enlarged, form the basis for a note now titled 'Points for a critical essay on the two histories by Croce: of Italy and of Europe.' The peculiarities of European states in the nineteenth century are used to explain certain features of the Restoration period and ultimately the relative success, within intellectual circles, of idealistic philosophy in peripheral/semi-peripheral areas more generally. Thus Gramsci sought in this note to expand upon his explanation of the success of the first

revision of Marxism, the idealist one, within the context of a broader explanation of idealism in general.

One aspect of Gramsci's discussion of idealism in this note is worth highlighting before we proceed to consider the second point. Contrary to the argument that Gramsci shared an Italian tradition of thinking on the state that gave pride of place to the state itself in unifying the nation, as in Gentile's theory of the ethical state (Bellamy and Schecter 1993, 17, 137) this note shows Gramsci consciously taking his distance from this tradition, while at the same time explaining the concrete social origins of the tendency of idealist philosophies, in Italy and abroad, to see the state as all-important. This he criticized theoretically too, for example in a brief note on the 'identification of the individual and the State' put forward by the actualist philosopher Ugo Spirito, a follower of Gentile's. This was utter nonsense, Gramsci essentially said, adding that 'it seems to me that this [confusion] is about the absence of a clear definition of the concept of State and of the distinction within it between civil society and political society, between dictatorship and hegemony etc.' (10ii§7: QC, 1245) Thus Gramsci took his distance from the authoritarian/dictatorial tendencies of a certain style of Italian thought, tendencies of which he was well aware. What is especially interesting in the note on Croce's histories, to be addressed here (10ii§61), is the fact that Gramsci's critique of intellectuals provided a concrete socio-historical explanation of these specific tendencies, as well as the general success of idealist philosophy.

As for the second point, Gramsci's discussion clearly reveals a propensity for structural/institutional explanations. What he provides in this note is, for all intents and purposes, a reflection on the role of intellectuals in peripheral/semi-peripheral areas based on the structural location of the state within the European state system and of intellectuals vis-à-vis the state. The structural location of the state itself plays a key role in Gramsci's explanation. A comparison between the French state that was born from the Revolution and the other states in continental Europe is 'of vital importance', Gramsci observes. He then sketches four phases of state formation, including

> 1) The revolutionary conflagration in France with the radical and violent change of social and political relations; 2) European opposition to the French Revolution and its diffusion by class "meatuses"; 3) French war, under the Republic and Napoleon, against Europe, first not to be put down [*soffocata*], then to set up a permanent French hegemony with the tendency to form a universal empire; 4) national counter-charges against French hegemony and birth of modern European states by successive small reformistic waves, not by revolutionary conflagrations like the original French one. The "successive waves" are constituted by a combination of social struggles, of interventions from above of the kind [undertaken by] an enlightened monarchy and by national wars, with a predominance of the last two [phenomena] (10ii§61: QC, 1358)

It is in the fourth phase, with its peculiar characteristics, that idealist philosophy thrived, indissolubly linked to the successive 'reformistic waves'. There is a parallel between these observations and some observations by Gramsci on Croce. The last phase with its 'waves' arguably recalls Gramsci's interpretation of Croce, during the 'crisis of Marxism' at the end of the Nineteenth Century, as the leader of European revisionism (10i§2). Croce's intellectual role in fact had a very political aspect that tended precisely to renew and keep alive 'old political forms' (10ii§59i: QC, 1353), precisely as one would expect of intellectuals in a peripheral/semi-peripheral area.

The structural location of intellectuals vis-à-vis states in peripheral/semi-peripheral areas explains their role in the successive 'reformistic waves' that involve the state in these areas.

> An important question connected to the preceding one concerns the role that intellectuals believe they have had in this long process of socio-political brewing harbored by the Restoration. Classical German philosophy is the philosophy of this period, it gives life to national liberal movements from 1848 to 1870. A propos this, one ought also to recall the Hegelian parallel ([drawn also by] the philosophy of praxis) between French practice and German speculation … (on this basis of [actual] historical relations one ought to explain the whole of modern philosophical idealism). (10ii§61: QC, 1359)

What is at stake for intellectuals in peripheral/semi-peripheral areas is a different relationship to the world of production, which in these areas is mediated by the state and sees intellectual groups playing a leading role, albeit indirectly, also in economic development. Unlike the revolution from below that occurred in France, where the classical Marxian scheme of the relationship between productive classes and the state applies (QC, 1359-60), the successive 'reformistic waves' are

for all intents and purposes revolutions from above, or 'passive revolutions' made possible by international development. Both the position of intellectuals and their views of the state are profoundly affected:

> when the thrust towards progress is not closely linked to local economic development that is artificially limited and repressed, but is the reflection of an international development that sends to the periphery its ideological currents, born on the basis of the productive development of the most advanced countries, then the group bearing the new ideas is not the economic group, but the rank of intellectuals and the conception of the state which is the object of propaganda changes in appearance: [the state] is conceived as something unto itself, as a rational absolute. (QC, 1360-1)

The observation could well apply to the role of the state in Hegel's own philosophy, as well as in those variants of idealist philosophy, like Gentile's actualism, that became fashionable under fascist rule in Italy. It is the position of intellectuals themselves vis-à-vis the state and the 'world of production' that comes to be affected and in its turn affects intellectual views

> The question can be set up thus: being the State the concrete form of a productive world and being intellectuals the social element from which the governmental personnel is drawn, it is typical [*proprio*] of the intellectual not yet strongly anchored to a strong economic group, to present the State as absolute: in this manner the function of intellectuals is itself conceived of as absolute and preeminent, their existence and historical dignity is abstractly rationalized. This motivation is fundamental to historically understand modern philosophical idealism and it is connected to the mode of formation of modern States in continental Europe as "reaction-national overcoming" of the French revolution which with Napoleon tended to establish a permanent hegemony ([this is] an essential reason to understand the concept of "passive revolution", of "restoration-revolution" and to understand the importance of the Hegelian comparison between the principles of the Jacobins and classical German philosophy). (QC, 1361)

1.6 – Philosophy and Intellectuals III: the Intellectuals-Masses Dialectic

Finally, both points that we have seen concerning the continued importance of culture and in particular intellectuals in Gramsci's reflections on philosophy can also be detected in the references to the role of intellectuals that can be found in Notebook 11, starting with the lengthy opening note in which Gramsci addresses preliminary questions for an introduction to the study of philosophy (11§12). Here Gramsci speaks of an 'intellectual-masses dialectic' (QC, 1386) that is important both to explain the success of intellectual movements and also as an illustration of

his socially grounded conception of culture. As far as the first point is concerned, this note is informed by the argument that for an intellectual movement to be truly successful an 'historical bloc' between intellectuals and masses ought to be established. Philosophy ought not to be conceived as the preserve of small intellectual groups devoted to the discovery of new concepts only. The socialization of well established concepts, their diffusion among the masses, 'is a "philosophical" fact rather more "original" and important than the finding on the part of a philosophical "genius" of a new truth *that remains the preserve of small intellectual groups*.' (QC, 1378, my emphasis) Indeed for Gramsci one of the main weaknesses of modern idealism, despite its successes in high culture, among intellectual groups themselves, had been precisely the failure to go the masses, the failure to create a bond between intellectuals and the masses (QC, 1381). A philosophical movement for Gramsci was 'truly such' only in so far as it established a link with the masses and became a broad-based culture, not if it limited itself to developing 'a specialized culture for narrow intellectual groups' (QC, 1382). The importance of going to the masses was partly for political reasons, to guarantee a broad endorsement of the movement and its defense. It was also partly for the social aspects of intellectual production itself, the excellence of which was guaranteed by a broad recruitment base (QC, 1386).

As far as the second point is concerned, we find clear references to a socially grounded conception of culture in Notebook 11 too. This comes across quite strikingly in the only other note in which intellectuals' role in cultural production is discussed at some length in this notebook. Titled 'Questions of nomenclature and content' (11§16) the note is concerned with explaining the continued influence of old conceptions of materialism over the reception of historical materialism, which ended up being perceived as just a modified variant of materialism, rather than a radically new philosophy (QC, 1410). Gramsci refers once more to Labriola on this topic (QC, 1411), but the main concern of the note is with language and the meaning that the term materialism has acquired over time and in different social settings, while also tending to retain its original meaning as derived from eighteenth-century philosophy. The role of intellectuals and their

position vis-à-vis both older intellectual groups and newer social groups that are their contemporaries is crucial in Gramsci's explanation of the perdurance of old meanings. Here the importance that Gramsci attached to language and also its inter-relationship with social groups and social structures becomes evident. 'No new historical situation, even if it is due to the most radical change, transforms language completely … but the content of language should change' (QC, 1407). This should occur through the work of intellectual groups that however find themselves in a double bind. On the one hand, they link up to older intellectual groups through the usage of the 'same nomenclature of concepts' (QC, 1407). They thus tend to maintain the old nomenclature, sometime for a good reason (QC, 1408). On the other hand, they are also inevitably related to and affected by the socio-economic activities of the newest social groups. But they do not always succeed in giving expression to these new developments, sometime clinging to the old content as well as the old nomenclature. Here language usage is clearly related by Gramsci to social structures including the particular configurations and relationship between intellectual groups and social classes.

It is the interaction among intellectuals and masses that is important in this socially grounded conception of culture. In another note titled 'Introduction to the study of philosophy. Language, languages and common sense', Gramsci explicitly makes the point that the question of language ought to be given priority, but this is expressly within the context of communication between social groups, hence with an eye to social stratification. This emphasis on the socially grounded nature of culture in general and language in particular is the basis on which Gramsci forms his critique of the pragmatist conception of language:

> Culture, in its various grades, unifies a greater or lesser quantity of individuals in numerous strata, more or less in direct [*espressivo*] contact, who understand each other to different degrees etc. It is these socio-historical differences and distinctions which reflect themselves in common language and produce those "obstacles" and those "causes of error" which the pragmatists have addressed (10ii§44: QC, 1330)

Gramsci then goes on to outline his views on the 'democratic philosopher' in this note, including in particular the pedagogical relationship of mutual influencing that obtains in hegemonic relationships 'between intellectuals and non

intellectuals, between rulers and ruled, between elites and followers, between vanguards and army corps.' (QC, 1331)

1.7 – Philosophy and Hegemony I: The Critique of Common Sense

Like any other kind of intellectual production, philosophy was caught up in the interaction between intellectuals and masses. As such, it inevitably possessed a political aspect, relating to the organization and leadership of masses by intellectual groups. This is the 'political question of intellectuals', which involved the creation of a group 'for itself', and thus the realization of class-consciousness, through the intervention of intellectuals: 'critical self-consciousness means politically and historically the creation of an intellectual elite: a human mass does not "distinguish" itself and does not become independent "for itself" without organizing itself (in a broad sense) and there is no organization without intellectuals' (11§12: QC, 1386). Thus philosophy is involved in questions at the very root of hegemony. Moreover, philosophy for Gramsci was also tied to hegemony *especially closely*. One reason for this was Gramsci's understanding of philosophy as a conception of the world. In this sense, philosophy was not an especially hard and unusual activity. Rather, everyone participates in philosophy, since a rudimentary philosophy is contained in language and common sense (QC, 1375). Indeed for Gramsci everyone is a philosopher because everyone needs a conception of the world in order to interact with it. Perhaps this view of philosophy derived from a notion of common sense typical of Italian culture and ultimately originating in Vico. Philosophy was thus also especially tied to hegemony, being all pervasive and organizing the everyday life of the masses (Jacobitti 1983, 369-70). In fact, however, Gramsci spoke about philosophy both in the broad sense of a conception of the world contained in common sense and also as the specialized activity of professional philosophers.

In this second sense philosophy was again especially closely tied to hegemony, but in this case philosophy and common sense are altogether different kinds of conceptions of the world for Gramsci, with an altogether different relationship to hegemony too. The two are differentiated by Gramsci on the basis of their internal coherence: philosophy is a coherent system, whereas common

sense is by its very nature amorphous and incoherent, full of diverse and possibly contrasting notions, accepted without the benefit of inventory (11§12: QC, 1398-9, 1399-400) and often with a predominance of notions of religious origins (QC, 1378, 1396). Gramsci's notion of common sense is thus the very antithesis of system and can be argued to represent an innovative and particularly useful conception of culture compared to the ones predominant in anthropology (Crehan 2011, 275, 281). In fact Gramsci saw other cultural productions such as specialized philosophy as inherently systematic and an even more interesting contribution by Gramsci arguably lies in his sketch of the inter-relationship between specialized philosophy and common sense. Reflecting their different characteristics, in fact, the two also have a different position in the historical process of the production of culture as envisaged by Gramsci.

Popular common sense – for Gramsci every class or group otherwise possess a common sense, meaning a diffuse body of opinions – belongs with a series of inter-related terms describing the process of creation and diffusion of culture that includes folklore and philosophy (Liguori 2006, 63-6, 71). In this series common sense is an intermediate term between folklore and philosophy proper. Philosophies, the coherent and articulated systems worked out by individual philosophers or a handful of intellectuals, have left traces or sedimentations in common sense. The latter is a shifting, active body of opinions, notions, etc. which enriches itself with accretions from a variety of sources, including 'scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered custom [*costume*]'. Over time, common sense solidifies to yield folklore, the rigid body of popular opinions of a given time and place. In this way '"common sense" is the folklore of philosophy and it is always in between folklore proper (that is, as it is commonly understood) and philosophy, science, the economics of scientists.' (24§4: QC, 2271) Common sense – or, more specifically, its good, healthy core, that Gramsci sometimes distinguishes by calling it *buon senso* or 'good sense'– has some important positive features. This includes a tendency towards an instinctive empiricism or direct observation of reality, that was rediscovered in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, as a reaction against the authority of the

Bible and Aristotle (10ii§48i: QC, 1334-5) in natural science. However, the disjointed and unreflecting character of common sense has drawbacks both for its theoretical usefulness and also for its usefulness as a tool of mass political mobilization.

The relationship to hegemony of common sense and of philosophy understood as the product of professional philosophers is therefore also different. Two different actions of philosophy to ensure hegemony are possible. These arguably coincide with the two definitions of hegemony that animate Gramsci's discussion, namely, of restricted or 'minimal' as opposed to expansive or 'integral' hegemony (Femia 1987, 46-7). In the first case, coinciding with restricted hegemony, philosophy acts only by guaranteeing the internal ideological coherence of the hegemonic groups. Philosophical systems act on the popular masses 'as an external political force, as an element of the cohesive force of leading classes, as an element therefore of subordination to an external hegemony' (11§13: QC, 1396). By contrast the common sense of the subaltern masses, lacking the coherence of philosophy, is necessarily limited for the sake of mobilization and it is indeed closely associated with the subordinate status of the groups that rely only on this form of worldview (Liguori 2006, 76, 80). In the second case, coinciding with expansive hegemony, philosophy acts to ensure the adherence of the subaltern groups to the hegemonic project. In this case, philosophy intervenes to 'educate' common sense, as it were, and make it more congruent or compatible with the hegemonic project. French culture is taken by Gramsci to be paradigmatic of this second case:

> In French philosophical culture there exist more treatments of "common sense" than in other national literatures: this is due to the more closely "national-popular" character of French culture, that is, to the fact that intellectuals tend, more than elsewhere, because of determinate traditional conditions, to draw near to the people in order to guide them ideologically and keep them tied to the leading group … The attitude of French philosophical culture towards common sense can actually offer a model of hegemonic ideological construction (11§13: QC, 1398).

Because it leaves accretions into common sense but also and especially because of this second case, in which philosophy contributes to hegemony by 'educating' common sense, Gramsci could thus state that 'philosophy is the critique and the

overcoming of religion and of common sense and in this sense it coincides with "good sense" which is in contrast with common sense.' (11§12: QC, 1378)

1.8 – Philosophy and Hegemony II: The Critique of Implicit Philosophy

It has been suggested that the disjointed character of common sense is the main cultural source of the subjection of subaltern classes to an external hegemony and their difficulty in organizing an effective hegemony of their own – a counter-hegemony, as it is called in the literature, though Gramsci never used the term (Crehan 2002, 108, 113). In fact, however, Gramsci emphasized both the need for internal coherence in the worldview of a group and also the need for coherence between its theory and practice, that is, its explicit and implicit philosophies. Thus the task of philosophy for Gramsci is not only to criticize disjointed common sense but also what he called 'implicit philosophy'. The latter affects mass political mobilization as much as the disjointed character of common sense and Gramsci indeed outlined a theory of false consciousness in which implicit philosophy is a key concept. Gramsci's views on implicit philosophy can also be very important in historiography or in political science. They are helpful to explain institutional change in the face of (relative) institutional stability, because of their inherent variability and degree of in-built contradiction (Clemens and Cook 1999, 449-50). They are also helpful to understand when and how a false consciousness may be detected in the life of a group (Lukes 2005, 6-7, 49-50). Both for theoretical and political reasons, therefore, it is important to review how Gramsci addressed the relationship between (explicit) philosophy, 'implicit philosophy' and hegemony. Quite tellingly, for the purpose of the philological reconstruction of Gramsci's purpose in writing an introduction to philosophy, most of the relevant discussion is contained in the lengthy introductory note on philosophy in Notebook 11 (11§12).

Gramsci refers to knowledge as 'implicit' meaning two separate things, both of which are strictly speaking different from the current use of the term in the expression 'implicit knowledge', although Gramsci was also aware of knowledge as undocumented (and undocumentable?) know-how in industrial and scientific

practices (11§36: QC, 1451-3), which is close to the meaning of 'implicit' in the current expression. In the first sense in which Gramsci used the term, a conception of the world that is widely accepted becomes implicit in a variety of cultural and other fields of human endeavor. A philosophy or worldview that has become a broad cultural movement and has come to be endorsed by large masses of people, thus generating a collective will, becomes an ideology in a broader sense of the word – 'a conception of reality and the world that manifests itself *implicitly* in art, in law, in economic activity, in all individual and collective manifestations of life…' (11§12: QC, 1380, my emphasis). In the second sense, a conception of the world is implicit in one's activity because it is not articulated, not elaborated systematically, and thus it is as yet in an embryonic stage.

> Working practically in the making of history one also works in [the making of] "*implicit*" *philosophy*, which will be "*explicit*" in so far as some philosophers will elaborate it [into a] coherent [whole], raising questions of knowledge which sooner or later will find, besides the "practical" form of their solution, also the theoretical form at the hands of specialists, after having immediately found the disingenuous form of popular common sense at the hands of the practical agents of historical change. (10ii§31: QC, 1273, my emphases)

This passage also makes a link between implicit philosophy and popular common sense, since both belong to laboring social groups, the 'practical agents of historical change'.

Implicit philosophy arguably belongs with the series folklore-common sense-(explicit) philosophy. It constitutes the unarticulated, implicit worldview that is found alongside the one(s) articulated in the folklore and common sense of popular groups, and the (explicit) philosophy of dominant, educated social groups. Significantly, there can be a contrast between activity and thought, between the implicit and explicit worldviews of a subaltern social group. The notion that a philosophy or worldview can be implicit in one's activity is discussed by Gramsci in passages that explore it in relation to the contradictions that can result if there is a lack of congruence between the implicit and explicit worldviews.

> There is no [such thing as] philosophy in general: there exist different philosophies or worldviews and [one] always makes a choice among them. How does this choice take place? Is this choice a merely intellectual fact or [is it] a more complex [affair]? And

> isn't there often a contradiction between the intellectual fact and [some] behavioral norm? *What will the real worldview be, then: the one [that is] logically asserted as an intellectual fact, or the one that emerges from each person's real activity, [the one] that is implicit in [their] actions*? And given that [their] actions are always political actions, can we not say that each person's real philosophy is entirely contained in their politics? *This contrast between thinking and acting, that is, the coexistence of two worldviews, one asserted in words, the other coming through in their effective actions*, is not always due to bad faith. Bad faith can be a satisfactory explanation for some individual singly taken [into consideration], or even for more or less large groups, [but] it is not a satisfying [explanation] when the contrast occurs in the life-expressions of large masses of people: then it cannot be but the expression of deeper contrasts of historic and social dimensions. It means that a social group that has its own worldview—albeit an embryonic one, that manifests itself in [their] activity, and therefore only once in a while, occasionally, that is when that group moves as an organic whole—has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, borrowed a worldview not of its own from another group, and this [worldview] it asserts in words, and this [worldview] it believes to be following, because it does follow it in "normal times", that is when behavior is not independent or autonomous, but rather [it is] submissive and subordinate. (11§12: QC, 1378-9, my emphases)

Gramsci deemed the effects of the contradictory consciousness that can result from the acritical acceptance of an explicit worldview that is at odds with the worldview implicit in one's activity, to be such as to lead to an inability to act. The active man of the people can thus find himself in a potentially paralyzing state of cognitive dissonance.

> His theoretical consciousness can be historically in contrast with his actions [*operare*]. One could almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness), one *implicit* in his actions that unites him with all those who collaborate with him in the practical transformation of reality and a superficially *explicit* [consciousness] [expressed] in words that he has inherited from the past and accepted without criticism. Nevertheless this consciousness [that is] expressed in words is not without consequences: it ties [him] to a specific social group, it influences [his] moral conduct, [it] directs his will, in a more or less energetic manner, that can reach the point where the contradictions [of his] consciousness are such that they do not permit any activity, any decision [being taken on his part] and produces a state of moral and political passivity. A critical self-understanding thus takes place through a struggle of political "*hegemonies*", of contrasting directions, first in the field of ethics, then within politics, [finally] to reach a superior development of one's conception of reality. (QC, 1385, my emphases)

For Gramsci, the development of one's conception of reality is necessarily a conflictual development. This is both because of the conflict between one's implicit and explicit consciousness or worldview and also because of the conflict between different worldviews, or hegemonic principles, that vie for primacy on

the ideological terrain. There is always, Gramsci insists, a conflict between different hegemonic, or ethico-political, principles even when, as in the early Italian Risorgimento, the opposing side is the Bourbon king and his loyalist reaction against modern liberal principles (10i§12: QC, 1236-7). The challenge for a subordinate social group striving to achieve its conception of reality, then, involves replacing disjointed common sense with a specific systematic and explicit philosophy that is also in accord with its implicit philosophy. It is a struggle to achieve coherence and unity between the worldview that one espouses and the worldview that is implicit in one's activity – a coherence and unity between theory and practice – which are not to be taken for granted.

> Even the unity of theory and practice, [of theoretical consciousness and practical activity], is not a mechanically given fact, but a historical development, that has its elementary and primitive phase in the feeling of "distinction", of "detachment", of independence, [a] barely instinctive [feeling], and progresses until [the point of] complete and real possession of a coherent and unitary worldview. This is why it is important to emphasize how the political development [or application] of the concept of hegemony represents a great philosophical, besides political-practical, achievement, because it involves and presupposes an intellectual unity and an ethics conforming to a conception of reality that has moved beyond common sense and has become, even though within as yet strict limits, [a] critical [conception]. (11§12: QC, 1385-6)

1.9 – Philosophy and Hegemony III: The Critical Conception of the World

The development of a critical conception of the world is a third distinct aspect of the relationship between philosophy and hegemony, besides the development of an internally coherent conception of the world and one that is coherent with the practical activity of a group, that is, in which explicit and implicit philosophy coincide. In fact Gramsci does not limit himself to arguing that a philosophy should be explicitly elaborated and fully articulated. It should also be a critical conception. We should now consider exactly what he meant by this requirement and in the process consider its exact relationship to hegemony. There is at least a suggestion that Gramsci's reflection on this aspect was linked to the specific (counter-)hegemonic project that he aspired to undertake before his arrest. This aspect too is in fact addressed in the lengthy opening note on the introduction to philosophy in Notebook 11 (11§12). Its location suggests that it was linked to

Gramsci's own reflection on cultural/ideological organization, including in particular the teaching at the party school that he undertook before his arrest and the whole question of formation of party cadres, of which that teaching, the return to Labriola and the criticism of Croce were all part. In this note, opening up a discussion of the role that an 'introduction to philosophy' would have for the reconstruction of Marxism, Gramsci briefly touched upon themes that are best understood in relation to his own political-party activity and projects before his arrest. Two parts of this brief discussion and its implicit relation to hegemony stand out. One is the sense in which Gramsci defined a conception of the world to be critical. The other is its relationship to theoretical elaboration.

A critical conception of the world is an integral part of consciousness and thus ultimately of class consciousness too. As such, it is implicitly linked to hegemony. The relationship to consciousness is sketched out by Gramsci at the beginning of his discussion of philosophy. Here Gramsci emphasizes the conscious features of a critical conception of the world, which is suggested to be socially informed, active and historical. The socially informed aspect of a critical conception emerges first. The point of studying philosophy for Gramsci is to achieve a critical comprehension of one's own self which is inextricably related to a comprehension of the social world in which one lives and which is the source of the conception of the world that we all acquire from our surrounding environment.

> Is it preferable to "think" without having a critical consciousness of it, in a disjointed and occasional manner, that is to "participate" in a conception of the world mechanically "imposed" by the external world, that is, by *one of the many social groups in which one is automatically involved ever since one's entry into the conscious world (and this can be one's village or province, [it] can have origin in the parish or the "intellectual activity" of the curate or of the patriarchal elder whose "wisdom" sets the law [in a community], of the little woman who has inherited the wisdom of witches or in the small intellectual soured in his own stupidity and inability to act)* (QC, 1375-6, my emphasis)

Soon after this passage Gramsci reiterates the role of the social world, emphasizing the importance of belonging to what for all intents and purposes is a Weberian status group of all people sharing a certain worldview: 'for one's conception of the world one always belongs to a determinate grouping, precisely to that of all the social elements which share a same manner of thinking and

operating. One is always a conformist in some conformism', Gramsci goes on to conclude, 'one is always a mass-man or collective-man.' (QC, 1376)

The active aspect of a critical conception emerges together with this socially informed aspect. In fact, Gramsci rhetorically contrasts the passive acquisition of a conception of the world from the social environment with critical comprehension, emphasizing, most of all, the element of conscious choice and active participation:

> or is it preferable to elaborate one's own conception of the world consciously and critically and therefore, in connection with this intense activity of one's brain, to chose one's own sphere of activity, to actively participate to the production of the history of the world, to be a guide to one's self and not to accept from outside the stamp of one's personality, passively and lying on one's back? (QC, 1376)

Later in the same note Gramsci emphasizes the active *political* involvement in hegemonic struggles through which one achieves a critical conception of the world:

> Critical comprehension of one's own self happens therefore through a struggle of political "hegemonies", of contrasting directions, first in the field of ethics, then of politics, to [finally] arrive at a superior elaboration of one's own conception of the real. The conscience to be part of a determinate hegemonic force (that is the political conscience) is the first phase for an ulterior and progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice are finally unified (QC, 1385).

Here Gramsci emphasizes the move to the active development of one's own hegemonic view, or of a view that at least has the hegemonic potential of being accepted by other groups.

The historical aspect stands out next in Gramsci's sketch. Like the passage just cited, it emphasizes consciousness of the self, in this case the self as an historical product:

> The start of critical elaboration is the consciousness of that which really is, that is a "know thyself" as product of the historical process that has so far taken place and that has left in your self an infinity of traces accepted without the benefit of an inventory. It is necessary to initially undertake such an inventory. (QC, 1376)

As made clear in this passage, critical comprehension is the product of consciousness of reality, of an historically informed 'know thyself' which rephrases in modern historicist terms the Socratic injunction. Gramsci goes on to

emphasize the historicist component of this formulation by stressing that 'one cannot separate philosophy from the history of philosophy and culture from the history of culture.' (QC, 1376) What he means to say is that one cannot understand philosophy without an awareness of the fact that it is an historical product. This is in the double sense of being the product of historical struggles between different conceptions with which one's conception is in contradiction (QC, 1376-7) and in the sense of being the product of specific historical developments, which have thrown up the problems that every conception of the world somehow addresses (QC, 1377).

There is also an emphasis upon pure theoretical elaboration in Gramsci's discussion of the relationship between philosophy and hegemony. Gramsci is thinking here about the critique of the common sense of the masses, but his discussion is also inter-related with the same critical philosophical practice that he advocated for intellectuals. Certainly, he sees this critical practice as not only useful for shaking off incoherent common sense but also at least potentially for the highest kind of intellectual elaboration. He expresses this aspiration explicitly: 'to critique one's own conception of the world means therefore to render it unitary and coherent and *to elevate it to the point to which the most advanced world thought has arrived.* It means therefore also to criticize all hitherto existing philosophy in so far as it has left consolidated stratifications in popular philosophy.' (QC, 1376, my emphasis) This passage is clearly related to the critique of popular common sense. But it is hard not to think here of Gramsci's call for a philosophical settlement of accounts with Crocean philosophy as the highest product of bourgeois culture in Italy. For Gramsci, in fact, to become hegemonic means also to be able to stand up to the highest theoretical challenges presented by historical development.

Conclusion

We shall now turn to this theoretical elaboration, as the next two chapters each address one key theoretical concept in Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. Before we do that, however, it is important to pause briefly and recapitulate the argument of this chapter. Here we have seen that, as Gramsci

drafted the first few miscellaneous notebooks and then gathered the earlier drafts into the first two thematic notebooks, philosophy emerged as a topic in its own right that was distinct from the study of intellectuals and hegemony. This emergence is tied to the reconstruction of Marxism, which Gramsci conceived of as first and foremost a philosophy. It was also tied to the return to Labriola, the founder of theoretical Marxism in Italy, who had first proposed that Marxism was a philosophy. And both the reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy and the return to Labriola came to be tied in their turn to the project for an Anti-Croce. This was to be a thorough settlement of accounts with the founder of neoidealist philosophy in Italy and his critique and revision of Marxism. However, even as he shifted his focus to work on philosophy, Gramsci retained an interest in intellectuals and hegemony. The notes on these subjects in the philosophical notebooks are interesting because they show a socially grounded notion of culture, as in his notes on intellectuals, and a socially and politically informed conception of philosophy, which was seen as central to hegemonic projects. But for all his emphasis upon philosophy as a critique of common sense, of implicit philosophy and of unconscious and unreflecting thought, Gramsci never lost interest in theoretical elaboration for its own sake. The concepts of praxis and of human nature were at the centre of his own efforts at theoretical elaboration in the reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy.

2 – PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

Praxis is the single most important concept in Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy. Indeed he comes to define and characterize Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. It is therefore crucial to understand what he meant by 'praxis'. The concept is derived from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, which Gramsci goes back to in order to rediscover the kernel of the new worldview at the basis of Marxism. In his re-reading and interpretation of this seminal text, Gramsci comes to understand praxis not just as human practical activity, which is only one term or moment of praxis. Rather, praxis comes to mean for Gramsci the unity of theory and practice, or of structure and superstructures, in human history. This re-definition led him to understand political activity as a pivotal element in the interaction between structure and superstructures and ultimately as a key component of praxis, if not indeed as the paradigmatic case of praxis. This is the fundamental element of Gramsci's originality within the Marxist tradition. Whereas Marxists tended to interpret praxis as productive activity, Gramsci came to interpret it as political activity. This had fundamental consequences for his reconstruction of Marxism. It influenced the way in which he conceptualized the acquisition of knowledge, as involving an interaction between subject and object, with the active involvement of the human subject. Hence it has fundamental implications for his discussion of natural science (ch. 4). It also influenced the way in which he conceptualized historical causation, as arising out of the interaction between production and human knowledge with the mediation of politics. Hence it has fundamental implications for his discussion of social sciences like economics (ch. 5) and political science (ch. 6).

This argument is relevant to four points regarding the interpretation of Gramsci. First, the argument is relevant to contemporary philological interpretations of Gramsci. The concept of immanence has been highlighted as a crucial concept of Gramsci's philosophy. It was, in particular, the concept that, in his re-formulation, helped him to articulate the worldly character of

philosophizing and thus to depart from idealist models (Thomas 2009, 319-25). The task in this chapter is to expand upon these arguments, linking Gramsci's re-formulation of the concept of immanence to his re-formulation of the even more fundamental concept of praxis (Frosini 2003, 143-4). This even more fundamental concept was closely related to social science. Indeed we find that Gramsci elaborated this concept of immanence, and ultimately of praxis, in relation to both Ricardo and Machiavelli. This chapter will show that the concept of praxis was also closely related to his reflections on the interaction between structure and superstructures, a question that is central to Gramsci's effort to reconstruct Marxism and which went through various phases (Cospito 2011, 19-76). It is in the context of tackling the interaction between structure and superstructures and in relation to a specific re-reading of Machiavelli that Gramsci came to add political activity to the definition of praxis as a pivotal moment in the making of history. This complemented, if it did not supersede, the traditional Marxian notion of praxis as productive activity, which in Gramsci survived chiefly as an especially positive evaluation of empirical science derived from a reading of Engels. It is in this specific sense, even more than in the sense that ultimately for Gramsci 'all is politics' (Coutinho 2006, 75, 81), that the centrality of politics to Gramsci's thought is proposed here.

Second, the argument is also relevant to interpretations of Gramsci as a cultural and/or linguistic theorist. Gramsci in fact develops his theory starting from the concept of praxis that he draws from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, not from pragmatism, let alone linguistic theories proposed by pragmatists. Without doubt, Gramsci left elements of a philosophy of language in the *Prison Notebooks* that developed insights from Marx and Engels (Schirru 2008a, 767-8). But the paradigmatic case of human practical activity for him was empirical science and then political activity above all, not language, though the latter was certainly implicated in all human social activities, including politics (Schirru 2008a, 780). Most importantly, as far as the reconstruction of Marxism itself was concerned, Gramsci was not influenced by linguistic theories, nor by pragmatist theories of language. When he turns to these theories within his discussion of the philosophy

of praxis, it is only with an interest in the question of language as a source of error. Gramsci did toy with pragmatist ideas in his youth, including in particular James's, but within the *Prison Notebooks* these left a trace only in his writings on Americanism and Fordism, as an effort to understand American culture (Mancina 1999, 326-8; Meta 2008, 873-4). This effort culminated in an ultimately negative view of pragmatism. The claim that pragmatism played a key role in revising the 'more abstract and humanistic aspects' of Italian neoidealism (Mancina 1999, 311) is without foundation. In general, Gramsci conceived of praxis as human practical activity within traditional Marxist schemas which he extended to politics, not in utilitarian/practical terms derived from pragmatism (Semeraro 2007, 29).

Third, the argument is relevant to Gramsci's relationship to contemporary theorists such as Croce, Gentile and Labriola. Gramsci's concept of praxis differed significantly from Croce's concept of practical activity, as well as Gentile's concept of the act. Gentile and to some extent Croce too, had been the main proponent in Italy of an interpretation of Marx's philosophy as a philosophy of praxis based upon a reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach* (Gentile 1954, 65-8). Gentile's work on 'Marx's philosophy' had received praise from such diverse quarters as Croce and Lenin. Hence the suggestion that Gentile had influenced the young Gramsci's reading of Marx and that this proves both the mediation of idealist currents in Gramsci's reception of Labriola and the ultimate influence of idealism on Gramsci more in general (Bergami 1977, 10-2, 100-11), a suggestion which can conceivably be extended to his reconstruction of Marxism in the *Prison Notebooks*. But Gramsci was aware and critical of the appropriation of such key Marxian concepts as praxis operated by Croce and Gentile. His Anti-Croce was to be also an Anti-Gentile and it was also part of the return to Labriola at least in the general sense that Gramsci appreciated the need to recover Labriola's approach to Marx. Furthermore, the legacy of Croce and Gentile's that mattered the most to Gramsci is best characterized not so much as idealism but as 'revolutionary humanism' (Jacobitti 1981) or 'historicist humanism'. It has indeed been suggested that the distinguishing feature of Croce's humanism in particular was

the appropriation of Hegelian historicism in a manner which sought to substitute the essentially theological notion of the *Weltgeist* with the humanistic and immanent notion of a *purely human* Spirit or consciousness unfolding through history. This led Croce himself to dissatisfaction with and the ultimate renunciation of idealism and it was also at the root of his philosophical break with Gentile's idealism (Roberts 1987, 3-7, 17-8, 60-3, 108-11). It is important to appreciate both that Gramsci came closer to Croce's interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and of the tasks of philosophy in general and also that he was aware of this difference between Croce and Gentile. He explicitly sought to develop a humanism that was a complete and thorough break with idealism and materialism alike and departed from Croce in advocating a thoroughly immanent and concrete conception.

Fourth, the argument is relevant to Gramsci's relationship to Western Marxism. This is often thought to involve a return to Hegelian idealist philosophy. Thus both Lukacs and Gramsci are characterized as 'Hegelian Marxists' and, more in general, 'humanism' understood as 'a quasi-idealist emphasis on subjectivity' is suggested as one of the defining characteristics of Western Marxism (Femia 2007, 98, 100). But in Gramsci's case, at least, humanism was defined rather specifically as an overcoming of idealism. This overcoming characterized both Marx's criticism of Hegel's system, which had to be turned on its head, as it were, as well as Gramsci's own critique of Croce's synthesis, which pretended to be a humanism while it surreptitiously re-introduced idealist transcendence. It is not fair to suggest that in Gramsci's case there was a reliance on extraneous philosophical foundations in the reconstruction of Marxism when the task he undertook was precisely to recover the kernel of the new worldview from the *Theses on Feuerbach* and their overcoming of idealism and materialism in a new synthesis.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part (1) describes the place of Gramsci's reflection on the concept of praxis within the *Prison Notebooks*. This reflection takes place chiefly alongside his notes on philosophy and the reconstruction of Marxism. It culminates in his definition of Marxism as a

'philosophy of praxis', the expression which becomes synonymous with Marxism in the later thematic notebooks. One trend that emerges in this reflection is the move away from the definition of praxis merely as the overcoming of idealism and materialism and towards a critique of Croce's attempted synthesis and, subsidiarily, of Gentile's. The second part (2) describes the central point of this critique. Gramsci came to characterize the philosophy of praxis as a humanism that gave pride of place to human practical activity in history and to criticize Croce precisely for his failure to provide a satisfactory synthesis that moved beyond idealism. Gentile was dismissed for having failed even more blatantly. The third part (3) describes a central theme that Gramsci derived from his engagement with Croce's (mis)interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, which became far more important than Gentile's. This is the theme of the unity of theory and practice, which Gramsci re-interpreted in a socially and historically concrete way. This re-interpretation is coherent with his desire to reconstruct Marxism as an 'absolute humanism' not suffering from the tendency of Croce's speculative synthesis to lapse back into idealism. Lastly, the fourth part (4) describes how Gramsci developed the theme of the interaction between structure and superstructures also starting from his critique of Croce's (mis)interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and in this process came to give political activity a key role in the very definition of praxis.

2.1 – The Development of the Notes on Praxis

Much like hegemony, the concept of praxis is not the subject of any dedicated analysis, so that there are no notes specifically dedicated to it, and not even a rubric, let alone a notebook, devoted to it. Rather, it is developed in a piecemeal fashion within notes dedicated to other topics. However, this development occurs specifically within the three philosophical 'Series' and then in the 'philosophical notebooks', Notebooks 10 and 11. The notion that Gramsci's use of the expression 'philosophy of praxis' to refer to historical materialism might have been a way around censorship has long been dispelled (Haug 2000, 4-7, 10). Instead, his use of the expression was probably meant to highlight the novelty that he attributed to Marxist philosophy and its fundamental difference from previous

philosophical currents (Zangheri 1999, 160-2). Furthermore, his engagement with the concept of praxis was itself an integral and foundational part of his reconstruction of Marxism. It was also part of the 'return to Labriola'. Indeed it has been suggested that Gramsci's emphasis on praxis emerged from his reading of Labriola, rather than Croce or Gentile (Haug 2001, 70-2; Dainotto 2009, 51-3, 58). This argument is upheld here, but only in a general sense, in the sense that Gramsci's project of reconstruction of Marxism was part of a general 'return to Labriola' as defined in the last chapter. It is chiefly through his engagement with Gentile and especially with Croce that Gramsci comes to define Marxism as a philosophy of praxis and against their interpretation of praxis that he defines his own. Indeed Gramsci does make one explicit reference to Labriola's notion that one could extract a 'philosophy of praxis' from Marxism, but tellingly this was derived from a work by Croce.

Two inter-twined developments stand out about Gramsci's elaboration of the concept of praxis in the three 'Series' on philosophy, culminating in the first thematic notebooks. The first development is that, following an early formulation emphasizing immanence, Marxism for Gramsci comes to be essentially a philosophy of praxis. Thus praxis comes to be the defining fundamental concept of the new philosophy. The second development is that, in defining praxis, Gramsci shifts his focus away from the early contrast between idealism and materialism in the reconstruction of Marxism, which he assumes to be a given fact, towards a critique of the speculative and abstract interpretation of praxis by Croce and Gentile, which he assumes to be a more urgent matter. This happens alongside the shift previously described in the first chapter, from a focus on the contrast between materialism and idealism in the three 'Series' to a focus upon drafting an Anti-Croce and an introduction to philosophy. Praxis was *not* to be interpreted in the Crocean or Gentilean sense, but with a re-reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach* which was an integral part of the return to Labriola and the Anti-Croce.

The need to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy of praxis was arguably implicit in Gramsci's discussion from the very beginning. Gramsci, following

Labriola, emphasized that Marxism was a new and original philosophy. Thus in the early contrast between idealism and materialism Gramsci emphasized both that neither one was the true source of Marxism and also that Marxism was not simply a fusion of idealism and materialism. In an early note titled 'Fundamental problems of Marxism' Gramsci addresses a crucial question for its reconstruction. Marx's 'personal philosophical culture' ought not to be confused with the fundamental 'constitutive parts' of Marxism. On the contrary, Marx superseded the various philosophical currents that had been part of his intellectual formation and started a new philosophy based on altogether new foundations: 'neither Spinozism, nor Hegelianism, nor French materialism is an essential part of historical materialism. Rather, the essential part of historical materialism is precisely that which none of those currents contained except in embryonic form and which Marx either developed or for the development of which provided the basic principles.' (4§11: PN, 152-3) The crucial point already evident in this passage is the idea that there is an 'essential part' to historical materialism that is to be found neither in materialism nor in idealism.

At this very early stage Gramsci's formulation of this essential part was still tentative and two qualifications ought to be made about it. One is that Hegel was nevertheless still accorded a special place by Gramsci, but this was *not* so much because he thought that Marxism had idealist foundations, as because he saw Hegel's philosophy as an early effort to transcend idealism and materialism: 'one should acknowledge that out of these "originative" elements Hegelianism is, relatively speaking, the most important, especially because of its effort to go beyond the traditional conceptions of "idealism" and "materialism".' (PN, 153) Hegelian idealism is also praised by Gramsci not for its conception of the 'totality' but precisely for its rejection of it. There is no pre-existing unified 'spirit' also because of the divisions within society. In a comment that could well be aimed at Crocean conceptions, Gramsci notes that 'as long as society is divided into groups, one cannot talk of the "spirit" without necessarily concluding that one is dealing with the "spirit" of a particular group.' (4§40: PN, 188). Hegelianism, by contrast, had first provided within a single philosophical system 'the

consciousness of contradictions', of the multitude of discordant views of reality, or incarnations of the human spirit, 'that previously could be obtained only from the ensemble of systems, from the ensemble of philosophers struggling with and contradicting each other.' (4§45: PN, 195) In this sense too Hegel was accorded a special place in the development of Marxism: 'In a certain sense,' Gramsci guardedly suggests, 'historical materialism is a reform and development of Hegelianism: it is philosophy freed from every unilateral and fanatical ideological element; it is the full consciousness of contradictions '. (PN, 195)

The other qualification about Gramsci's early formulation is that it seems to be suggesting that the new 'essential part' that Marx developed was the concept of immanence. Immanence was indeed important to Gramsci's search for the philosophical foundations of Marxism, but only as a stepping stone to something else. Referring to Bukharin's dismissal of Marx's references to the concept of immanence as being only metaphorical, Gramsci lays emphasis precisely on this concept in his first passage on Hegel, differentiating Marx from the latter for having given a concrete meaning to immanence. 'Marx attached a specific meaning to the term "immanence" – in other words, he is not a "pantheist" in the traditional metaphysical sense; rather he is a "Marxist" or a "historical materialist".' (4§11: PN, 153) Gramsci returns to this very point in a slightly later note which explicitly associates Marxism with the concept of immanence. 'The term "immanence" in Marx has a precise meaning, and this should have been defined [by Bukharin]; in fact, such a definition would really have been "theory". Marx continues the *philosophy of immanence*, but he rids it of its whole metaphysical apparatus and brings it to the concrete terrain of history.' (4§17: PN, 159, my emphasis) Marxism, Gramsci states here, 'continues' the philosophy of immanence, but he also states immediately that if Marx referred to immanence in a metaphorical sense it was because 'the conception has been superseded, developed, etc.' (PN, 159). Indeed Gramsci would not characterize Marxism itself as a 'philosophy of immanence' in his later work, since the concept of immanence itself would be subsumed under another more fundamental concept yet.

What then was the 'essential part' of the new philosophy? A note discussing Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology* anticipates one aspect of Gramsci's answer, besides clarifying his theoretical criticism of idealism and materialism. Addressing a discussion by Bukharin to the effect that 'every society is something more than the sum of its parts' and that thus there is something above and beyond society understood as a sum of individuals interacting with each other, Gramsci discusses whether this something is to be found in ideas or matter. In the study of human societies, he suggests, the notion of pure ideas or pure matter, as something 'unto itself' is untenable.

> Idealism hypostatizes this "something"; it makes it into an entity unto itself, the spirit, just as religion had done with divinity. But if what religion and idealism produce is an "hypostasis" – that is, an arbitrary abstraction rather than a procedure of analytic distinction that is practically convenient for teaching purposes – then the "deification" of matter, etc., by vulgar materialism is also a "hypostasis" (4§32: PN, 172-3)

Thus for Gramsci both idealism and materialism actually refer to 'a procedure of analytic distinction' whereby, for analytical as well as pedagogical purposes, we distinguish between pure ideas and pure matter in the historical process. The analogous failure of idealism and materialism is to produce an hypostasis from this analytical distinction, that is, to transform it into an 'entity unto itself' that is then placed over and above society in the historical process.

What Gramsci proposes instead is an interpretation of Marxism based on the concept of praxis, which was in the same broad foundational relation as the spirit or ideas to idealism and matter to materialism. But this was not the same concept of praxis as appropriated by Gentile and Croce. Indeed the first clear statements to the effect that praxis was the fundamental concept of the new philosophy already contains a clear effort at distinguishing it from Gentile's (and Croce's) reading. It is in a note regarding 'the question of the "objectivity" of knowledge from the point of view of historical materialism'. (4§37: PN, 176) Introducing the term 'praxis' for the first time in the 'Series', Gramsci goes on to contrast it with matter and spirit. Note that Gramsci puts the term monism in quotes. This suggests that he is not interested in literally defining the philosophy of praxis as a monism, the view that reality is constituted of only one kind of

entity. He is merely concerned, in this passage, with establishing an analogy between praxis, matter and spirit.

> How is "monism" to be understood in this context? It is obviously neither idealistic not materialist "monism," neither "Matter" nor "Spirit," but rather "historical materialism," that is to say, *concrete human activity* (history): namely, activity concerning a certain organized "matter" (material forces of production) and the transformed "nature" of man. *Philosophy of the act (praxis), not of the "pure act" but rather of the "impure" – that is, the real – act, in the most secular sense of the world*. (PN, 176-7, my emphases)

There is a problem with this translation. Actually, in the original Italian the third line from last reads: 'and "nature" transformed by man', *not* 'the transformed "nature" of man'. But the most important point about this passage is Gramsci's rejection of the notion of a 'pure act'. This is first and foremost a rejection of Gentile's appropriation of the philosophy of praxis as put forward in the latter's *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro*, the 'General theory of the spirit as pure act'. It might also possibly imply a rejection of Croce's appropriation of the concept of 'pure act', as found in his *Breviary of Aesthetics*, which Gramsci had in prison. Here Croce, in discussing 'which of the various activities of the spirit is real', states that only the spirit itself as a whole is real, 'the Spirit which is the true Absolute, the *actus purus*.' (Croce 2007, 50). Furthermore, in proposing an alternative to the interpretation of praxis as 'pure act', Gramsci's original had emphasized the impure act in the most 'profane' sense and this very term has been linked to both his reading of Marx's *Holy Family* and his acceptance of Croce's rendition of Moses Hess' *Philosophie der Tat* as 'philosophy of the act' in an article that he wrote before his incarceration (Frosini 2008, 745-6). All this indicates that Gramsci from the very beginning rejected Gentile's and Croce's appropriation of the concept of praxis as 'pure act' and associated it at best with idealist philosophy.

The most important source for Gramsci's concept of praxis is not Gentile or Croce, but the *Theses on Feuerbach* themselves, which he undertook to translate while in prison, fully aware of the tendentious interpretation of praxis furnished by Gentile and Croce. The translation cannot be dated accurately. It might indeed have coincided with the drafting of the earliest notes in the first

'Series' – there is indeed a very early reference to this work (4§3). The text translated by Gramsci was the one provided by Engels (Frosini 2004, 99) which has been criticized for the editorial liberties that Engels took with the original (Haug 2000, 1, 13, note 7). But what is important here is that Gramsci sought to go back to the original in order to revise Gentile's and Croce's misappropriation of the concept of praxis. The very concept of immanence which Gramsci initially used for his critique was possibly derived from his reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, with additional references to Giordano Bruno and Machiavelli and a later decisive contribution from Ricardo. Together with the differences in Gramsci's translation from Gentile's (Frosini 2004, 97-9), this suggests a decisive break with Gentile and Croce on this, as well as on other fronts.

From these beginnings, Gramsci would focus thereafter on his critique of Croce's and Gentile's reformulations of the concept of praxis, leaving behind the earlier concern with praxis as the superseding of idealism and materialism alike. There is a lull in his elaboration of the concept of praxis, which is not really mentioned in the 'Second Series' except in passing (7§35: PN, 187), though he refers to the *Theses on Feuerbach* (7§1). But he returns to it in the 'Third Series', where he also starts to formulate his work plans for an Anti-Croce and a general introduction to philosophy. Thus in a note titled 'Philosophy of praxis' Gramsci criticizes Croce's interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as assigning pre-eminence to practical activity over theory. Here Gramsci also explicitly associates this criticism of Croce's reading with the return to Labriola, recognizing that Croce himself had acknowledged in his critical essays on Marxism 'that Antonio Labriola was justified in pointing out the need to construct a "philosophy of praxis" on the basis of Marxism.' (8§198: PN, 348) From this point onwards Gramsci's work on the philosophical foundations of Marxism, on what he had previously called the 'essential part' of the philosophy, proceeds alongside the direction of a criticism of Croce's and Gentile's misinterpretation and misappropriations on the concept of praxis that originated in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, together with a reconstruction of Marxism precisely as a philosophy of praxis, something that Bukharin had signally failed to do in his introduction to

Marx's thought. In a slightly later note criticizing Bukharin for his failure to engage common sense, Gramsci first refers to Marxism as a 'philosophy of praxis' in passing (8§220: PN, 369).

Later still, in the brief note where he first mentions the Anti-Croce, Gramsci dismisses Croce's approach as speculative, confirming the characterization of Marxism as a 'philosophy of praxis', which, he suggests in passing, had gone through and superseded the concept of immanence. Gramsci begins this note by mentioning two different 'series', presumably intellectual development paths, that differentiate Crocean neo-idealism from Marxism, now again identified as the 'philosophy of praxis'. Gramsci writes: 'In addition to the series "transcendence, theology, speculation—philosophical speculation", the other series "transcendence, immanence, speculative historicism—philosophy of praxis. All historicist theories of a speculative character have to be reexamined and criticized.' (8§235: PN, 378) What is striking about this telegraphic summary is that Croce's philosophical development culminates in 'philosophical speculation', while the other development – presumably Marx's – passes through immanence and culminates in the 'philosophy of praxis'. Even more than idealism per se, it is the 'speculative character' of Croce's historicism that has become the chief target of Gramsci's criticism and that is at the basis of the proposed Anti-Croce. At the same time, Marxism has to be reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis. This new approach is confirmed in the thematic notebooks, Notebooks 10 and 11. The most notable sign is in the fact that, starting from the above passages in Notebook 8, the expression 'philosophy of praxis' becomes synonymous with Marxism. Gramsci preferred this characterization of Marxism to 'historical materialism' and in fact systematically replaced the last expression throughout with 'philosophy of praxis' as he re-drafted earlier notes and wrote new ones into Notebooks 10 and 11.

2.2 – Praxis as The Foundation of a Concrete Humanism

The shift from this early concentration upon the contrast between idealism and materialism to a discussion of the interpretation of the concept of praxis is central to Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism. So too is his criticism of Croce and

Gentile, whose main threat to the reception (and reconstruction) of Marxism comes to be seen not so much in neoidealism per se, but, more specifically, in the speculative and abstract reformulation of Marxist humanism effected by Croce and Gentile. The development of the concept of praxis had served precisely to recompose the contrast between idealism and materialism into a new form of humanism that posited human practical activity as the driving force of history in place of ideas and matter. This was the kernel of the new worldview to be found in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Gramsci appreciated that Croce and Gentile had recognized this and founded their philosophies upon a certain interpretation of this fundamental philosophical insight. He altogether rejected their interpretation, however, as purely abstract and speculative, counterposing to it a profane and earthly interpretation of praxis as human practical activity that differentiated it, amongst other things, from the purely speculative conception of human activity proposed by Croce and Gentile. In a parallel move to the critique of Gentile's interpretation, Gramsci emphasizes the 'absolute immanence' or ' "absolute earthliness"' of the historical foundations of philosophy in his critique of Croce. (10ii§31: QC, 1271) All this amounted to a call for a concrete humanism to replace Croce's and Gentile's abstract theories and which would proceed in a historically concrete rather than speculative fashion in interpreting history.

In the drafting of Notebook 10 we indeed observe the continuation and accentuation of the trend that first emerged in the miscellaneous notebooks. The single most important trend in Gramsci's elaboration of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis was the shift away from a concern with praxis as the overcoming of idealism and materialism to a concern with the need for socially and historically concrete interpretation of the concept of praxis. This was in contrast to the speculative interpretations of the concept of praxis provided by Croce and Gentile. Together with this fundamental trend, another one is arguably discernible in the drafting of Notebook 10. This is a trend away from concern with Gentile's misinterpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, to be replaced by an emphasis on Croce's interpretation. Indeed it has been pointed out that Gentile's philosophy of the act played a negligible role in Gramsci's own theoretizing, which was

informed throughout by Marxist concepts (Sasso 2003, 378). But the two trends just highlighted are closely related, since the shift in interest from Gentile to Croce is at least partly justified by the fact that Gramsci deemed the latter's philosophy to be less prone to speculative excesses. The suggestion that the re-translation of key concepts from speculative to concrete language was merely a technique, and one that possibly lost some of the essential insights of Crocean idealism (Sasso 2003, 360-1), fails to understand the import of Gramsci's critique of speculative procedures. For Gramsci, speculation had re-introduced transcendence in Croce's philosophy, effectively nullifying the most fundamental insight of this philosophy, which claimed to be a humanism denying a theological understanding of the Spirit (Kahn 1985, 19-20). It thus undid the fundamental insight of Marx's philosophy of praxis, which now had to be recovered.

To be precise, the question of the overcoming of idealism and materialism does not disappear altogether from Gramsci's concerns. Only, the emphasis shifts to how the new synthesis had been misappropriated. Alongside the twin questions of speculation and immanence, Gramsci points out at the beginning of Notebook 10, another question ought to be addressed, 'concerning the attitude of the philosophy of praxis toward the current continuation of classical German philosophy represented by the modern Italian idealist philosophy of Croce and Gentile.' (10ii§10: QC, 1248) The incorporation of the fundamental lessons of Hegelian philosophy that had first animated Marxism was not a one-off deal, now a closed chapter. Rather, 'the reciprocally unilateral position between idealism and materialism criticized in the first thesis on Feuerbach is reproduced once again and just like then, *albeit in a superior moment*, a synthesis is necessary in a superior moment of development of the philosophy of praxis.' (QC, 1248-9, my emphasis) It is not exactly the same contrast between idealism and materialism that is re-proposed in Gramsci's days, then, but a new one at a 'superior moment' that requires being overcome in a yet superior new synthesis. Gramsci gives an indication of what he thought the new synthesis was in Notebook 11. In a second draft of an earlier note critiquing Bukharin for having dismissed the concept of immanence in Marxism as having only a metaphorical use, Gramsci reiterates that

the concept of immanence had to be clarified rather than dismissed, and concludes by adding, compared to the earlier note, that 'the philosophy of praxis is absolute "historicism", the absolute worldliness and earthliness of thought, *an absolute humanism of history*. Along this line one ought to dig the vein of the new conception of the world.' (11§27: QC, 1437, my emphasis). Here Gramsci explicitly identifies the new synthesis as a form of humanism. Furthermore, he clarifies, it is a concrete humanism that approaches the study of history in a socially and historically concrete way rather than an abstract and speculative one.

Croce's and Gentile's speculative procedure becomes the key fault of their philosophies. The early note raising the question of the relationship of the philosophy of praxis to Croce's and Gentile's philosophies (10ii§10) is preceded by another, crucially important, note highlighting the rejection of the speculative procedure as the fundamental conquest of the philosophy of praxis. The note is concerned with the concept of immanence. However, the distinction between speculative and historicist or concrete procedures is even more important than immanence per se: speculative immanence ought to be distinguished from concrete immanence and speculative immanence rejected. The note is in fact titled 'Speculative immanence and historicist or realist immanence' (10ii§9: QC, 1246). Here Gramsci suggests that Marxism first developed from German classical philosophy, French political thought and English economics precisely because the speculative procedure of German philosophy was replaced by the socially concrete procedures of politics and economics. Thus 'the new concept of immanence, from its speculative form, offered by classical German philosophy, has been translated into a historicist form with the help of French politics and English classical economics.' (QC, 1247) Gramsci indeed suggests that the 'methodological canons introduced by Ricardo in economic science' might have had a great philosophical value precisely by undermining speculative procedure and enabling the acquisition of a truly historicist conception of immanence (QC, 1247), whereby the concept of economic law was explained exclusively in terms of human practical activity, thus without recourse to any transcendental concepts over and above this activity. By contrast, what distinguished Croce's philosophy

was its speculative procedure: 'all that is "healthy" and progressive in Croce's thought is none other than the philosophy of praxis, presented in a speculative language.' (10ii§29: QC, 1267-8)

This speculative procedure was ultimately responsible for the re-introduction of transcendence, for unwittingly positing ideas once again as something over and above concrete human practical activity in history. Croce's conception of the (human) spirit or consciousness unfolding through history, in particular, shows that his philosophy had absorbed the need for a humanist synthesis but not that for a concrete and truly immanent one. Croce's philosophy does not conceive of human thought as absolutely worldly or immanent thought, but detaches it from other human practical activities. In the redrafting of the early note which had first envisaged an Anti-Croce, Gramsci emphasized the fight against speculative thought as a central goal, adding a new question. 'Hasn't "speculation" (in the idealist sense) introduced a new type of transcendence in the philosophical reform characterized by immanentist conceptions?' Gramsci asks (11§51: QC, 1477) In the very first note that Gramsci jotted down in the second part of the notebook on 'the philosophy of Benedetto Croce' he forcefully made an analogous point. 'How can one formulate for Croce's philosophy the problem of "setting man on his feet", of making him walk with his feet and not with his head? It is the problem of the residues of "transcendence, metaphysics, theology" in Croce, it is the problem of the quality of his "historicism".' (10ii§1: QC, 1240) And in a note on the inter-related topics of 'Transcendence – theology – speculation' Gramsci highlights that for all its effort to appear closer to life, there is nevertheless in Croce's philosophy 'not just a trace of transcendence and theology, but the whole of transcendence and theology just barely freed from the coarsest mythological rind.' (10i§8: QC, 1225) By contrast, Gramsci emphasizes, 'the philosophy of praxis certainly derives from the immanentist conception of reality, but [only] in so far as it has been cleansed of any speculative remnants and reduced to pure history or historicity or to *pure humanism*.' (QC, 1226, my emphasis) Here lies the fundamental difference between Croce's philosophy and the philosophy of praxis. 'The philosophy of praxis is the historicist conception of

reality, which has freed itself from any residue of transcendence and theology even in their latest speculative incarnation; Crocean idealist historicism remains still in the theological-speculative phase.' (QC, 1226)

The second trend in Gramsci's elaboration of the concept of praxis follows closely this shift in interest from the contrast between materialism and idealism to the one between speculative and concrete interpretations of the philosophy of praxis. It is a shift in interest away from Gentile's and towards Croce's interpretation of the philosophy of praxis. If Gramsci's first reference to praxis in Notebook 4 referred, albeit critically, to Gentile's interpretation of praxis as the 'pure act', by the time he came to draft Notebook 10, the questions raised by Gentile's interpretation have been simply bypassed and what criticism of Gentile Gramsci still envisages has been entirely subordinated to the criticism of Croce and subsumed under it. To be sure, Gramsci retained the first passage, but only in the context of epistemology (11§64). In Notebook 10, however, he clearly subordinates the criticism of Gentile to that of Croce. This is in part because Gramsci becomes convinced that Croce's influence was more important than Gentile's (10ii§41iv: QC, 1306). It is also, more fundamentally, because Gentile was even more prone than Croce to speculation. The collaboration between Croce and Gentile came to an end because of political reasons related to the rise of fascism, but there had also been fundamental philosophical differences concerning Gentile's penchant to refer to a reality beyond the (human) spirit (Mustè 2008, 87,91, 95). For Gramsci, Croce's fall-out with Gentile and subsequent criticism had actually had a salutary effect on his philosophy: 'the polemic against the philosophy of the pure act of Giovanni Gentile has forced Croce into a greater realism and into experiencing a certain annoyance for and impatience with at least the exaggerations of the speculative language' so in vogue among the minor followers of Gentile's philosophy (10i§11: QC, 1234). It is in this subordinate sense that 'an Anti-Croce would have to be also an Anti-Gentile; Gentilean actualism will give the chiaroscuro effects to the picture that are necessary for greater relief.' (1234) The criticism of Gentile, Gramsci is

clearly implying here, will not add anything of substance to the critique of speculative philosophy.

2.3 – Praxis as The Unity of Theory and Practice

The two trends are arguably at work also in the specific case of Gramsci's interest in the question of the unity of theory and practice. This question was central to Croce's, not Gentile's, work. And in addressing this Crocean question Gramsci had recourse to Machiavelli and Ricardo, not to Gentile (Frosini 2008, 743-4). The question was indeed a central point of Croce's *Philosophy of Practice*, first published in 1908 as a statement of Croce's own philosophical synthesis after his turn from Marx to Hegel (Croce 1957, Section 3). The 1932 edition is preserved among the works that Gramsci had in jail. He might have received it too late to have directly influenced his formulation of the problem, though one wonders whether he had not already read it before his incarceration. Regardless of the question of the exact original source of this concept, however, Gramsci's formulation of it certainly stems from his engagement with Croce's interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. This engagement has a crucial implication for the very notion of praxis itself as interpreted by Gramsci. It has been suggested that Gramsci accepted the fundamental Crocean insight that 'consciousness is antecedent to facts' (Kahn 1985, 28). Far from it. In earlier formulations Gramsci seems to have interpreted praxis to stand for practical activity as opposed to theoretical activity, that is, for facts to be antecedent to consciousness. For example, he emphasized purely empirical scientific investigation as opposed to theoretical inquiry. In this sense it is possible to agree that Gramsci did not believe in epistemology – or ontology, for that matter – as a 'first philosophy', but rather came close to Adorno's conception of 'last philosophy' (Haug 2001, 72, 78). After his engagement with Croce Gramsci came to interpret the *Theses on Feuerbach* as proposing a unity of theory and practice so that, by extension, praxis comes to be associated with this unity rather than with the practical moment alone. For both Croce and Gramsci consciousness and fact were united in the historical process.

For all the importance of Gramsci's engagement with Croce's question of the unity of theory and practice, however, his formulation remained markedly different from Croce's. Perhaps Gramsci's very conception of science, privileging empirical work against Croce's dismissal, also involved a fundamentally different way of conceptualizing the interaction between subject and object (Boothman 1994, 172-8). Certainly, however, Gramsci fundamentally re-translated Croce's question into socially and historically concrete language from its purely speculative formulation in terms of the unity of different aspects of the spirit. And in this translation he was informed, amongst other things, by a very concrete understanding of practice that privileged empirical science, which he inherited from Engels. Gramsci's engagement with Croce's interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, his engagement with Engels' notion of science, as well as his engagement of Croce's dialectic of dictions, all show this process of re-translation of the question of the unity of theory and practice into a concrete language. Far from being a mere technique, this re-translation opened the door to the re-appropriation of social sciences, so thoroughly rejected by neoidealist thinkers, as the basic disciplines to understand history.

The question of the unity of theory and practice first acquired theoretical significance in the *Prison Notebooks* within the context of Gramsci's engagement with Croce's interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. We find this interpretation addressed in a brief early note (8§198) significantly followed immediately by another brief note titled 'Unity of theory and practice' (8§199) in which Gramsci refers to Aquinas, Leibniz and Vico as possible precursors and concludes: 'Historical materialism is certainly indebted to this concept (as originally found in Hegel and not in its Crocean derivation).' (PN, 349) Gramsci would redraft and significantly expand the early note in Notebook 10, this time explicitly linking Croce's interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* to the question of the unity of theory and practice and suggesting that Marx's theses had precisely advocated this unity. Gramsci thus rebuked Croce's criticism that Marx had advocated the replacement of theory by practice, of philosophy by revolutionary activity, as testified by the famous eleventh thesis (10ii§31: QC,

1270). In fact, however, Croce had mentioned all of the theses (Croce 1950, 298) and singled out the second, fourth, tenth and eleventh as especially telling of Marx's position on the pre-eminence of practice over theory (Croce 1950, 298-9). Still, what Gramsci did in re-interpreting the eleventh thesis was both to answer that Marx argued for the unity of theory and practice, rather than the replacement of theory by practice, and also to give a socially concrete interpretation of this unity that starkly contrasts with Croce's.

Indeed, in his second draft of the note, Gramsci speaks explicitly and unequivocally of an 'interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as advocating *the unity of theory and practice*'. (10ii§31: QC, 1270, my emphasis). He also goes on to explain this unity in terms of two reciprocal arguments, both of which display a socially and historically concrete approach compared to Croce's. On the one hand, the philosophy of praxis had proposed this unity in its notion of the continuation of the theoretical moment in a practical one, as the truths acquired in contemplation are put into practice. The interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as advocating a unity of theory and practice, Gramsci states,

> can also be justified with the famous statement that "the German workers' movement is the heir of classical German philosophy", which does not mean, as Croce writes: "a heir which would not continue the activity of the predecessor, but would start another one, of different and opposed nature" but means exactly that the "heir" continues [the activity of] the predecessor but continues it "practically" because from the mere contemplation it has deduced an active will, transforming of the world, and in this practical activity is also contained "knowledge", which to the contrary only in practical activity is "real knowledge" and not "scholasticism" (QC, 1271)

On the other hand, Gramsci effectively argued, the philosophy of praxis had also proposed for all intents and purposes that the practical moment was continued in the moment of theoretical elaboration. It was practical development that gave rise to the questions addressed by philosophers or theoreticians and, in general, theory ultimately developed because the whole of society developed and not because one great philosopher or theoretician was succeeded by an even greater one (QC, 1272-3).

The interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as advocating a unity of theory and practice, rather than the pre-eminence of practice over theory, was later

carried over into another context. This context involves science and, in particular, the re-elaboration of Engels' notion of science. It also shows Gramsci's eminently concrete interpretation compared to Croce's. Referring to Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Gramsci had highlighted a very concrete understanding of human activity that privileged experimental science and technology: 'for Engels "history" is practice (experiment, industry) [whereas] for Croce History is still a speculative concept', as Croce had effectively retraced back the step towards 'a "concrete and historical" philosophy, the philosophy of praxis'. (10ii§31: QC, 1271) Following his engagement with Croce, however, Gramsci came to specify that the 'experiment, industry' was the unity of both theoretical and practical moments, rather than the assertion of a practical over a theoretical moment. In an earlier comment on Engels's conception of science Gramsci had asked whether science was to be understood as the theoretical or practical-experimental activity and had suggested that science (objective knowledge) was to be identified with practical-experimental activity (4§47). When he came to re-draft this note in Notebook 11, however, Gramsci clearly shifted his emphasis from privileging practical over theoretical activity to emphasizing science as the synthesis of the two, adding a couple of short but crucial sentences to this effect:

> What should be understood by science, the theoretical activity or the practical-experimental activity of scientists? *or a synthesis of the two activities?* One could say that in this [synthesis] is the unitary process that typifies reality, in the experimental activity of the scientist which is the first model of dialectical mediation between man and nature, the elementary historical cell whereby man, entering into relation with nature by means of technology, [comes to] know and dominate it. … Scientific experimentation is the first cell of the new production method, the new form of active union between man and nature. The experimental scientist is also a worker, not a pure thinker and his thought is continuously controlled by practice and, conversely, [his practice is controlled by thought], *until a perfect unity of theory and practice is achieved* (11§34: QC, 1448-9, my emphases)

This interpretation of the unity of theory and practice as exemplified by experimental science is fundamentally concrete and historicist compared to Croce's formulation of the unity of theory and practice as the unity of different aspects of the spirit.

Another context in which Gramsci addresses the unity of theory and practice involves history and, in particular, the re-elaboration of Croce's theory of distinctions. Croce divided the theoretical and practical aspects of the spirit as they manifested themselves through history into four 'distincts' or distinctions (*distinti*), sometime also called moments of the spirit, by which he essentially meant different categories of human consciousness. The theoretical aspect was further subdivided into logical and aesthetic categories, while the practical aspect was further subdivided into economic and ethical categories, involving the determination of the useful and the good respectively, and constituting the ultimate subject matter of his *Philosophy of Practice*. All four categories of human consciousness were dialectically united through a complex scheme in Croce's formulation (Mustè 2008, 25, 48-9), which ultimately thus involved also the question of the unity between theory and practice. Gramsci aimed to re-translate Croce's abstract formulation into a concrete and historical one and in so doing he had recourse to the concept of 'historical bloc', which he (mistakenly) attributed to Sorel.

> The question is the following: given the Crocean principle of the dialectic of distinctions (which is to be criticized as a purely verbal solution to a real methodological need, since it is true that there do not exist only opposites [or theses/antitheses] but also distinctions) what relationship other than [the purely verbal notion of] "implication in the unity of the spirit" will there exist between the economic-political moment and other historical activities? Is a speculative solution of these problems possible [at all], or only a historical solution, given by the concept of "historical bloc" presupposed by Sorel?' (10ii§41x: QC, 1316)

Gramsci is effectively providing here a concrete reformulation of Croce's account of the unity of the different categories of the spirit and thus, ultimately, of its theoretical and practical aspects. Sorel's concept of 'historical bloc', in fact, was understood by Gramsci in concrete historical terms, as the unity or reciprocity that there existed between structural and superstructural elements in historical development. The different categories of human consciousness corresponded to various moments or stages of the superstructures, more or less closely related to the structure, starting with the economic category. Croce in fact implicitly admitted Marx's schema, including the primacy of the structure understood 'as a

reference point and dialectical impulse for the superstructures, that is "the distinct moments of the spirit".' Gramsci goes on to emphasize here that 'the point of Croce's philosophy on which it is necessary to insist seems to be precisely the so-called dialectic of dictinctions' (QC, 1316). The main problem of Crocean historiography is indeed precisely that it fails to provide an acceptable account of what unites, or strives to unite, different aspects of human consciousness. Croce's distinctions are simply posited in his philosophy to be part of a spiritual unity. Gramsci opposes to it a concrete historical account riven with conflict, based on the interaction of structure with superstructure.

2.4 – The Unity of Structure and Superstructures

Gramsci's investigation of the concept of praxis in fact overlapped all along with the concurrent investigation, started in the first 'Series' on philosophy, into the interaction of structure and superstructures. The note in which he first mentioned the concept of praxis, rejecting Gentile's interpretation of it as the 'pure act', had in fact begun by asking about the role of ideologies in the production of knowledge and suggested that the problem be addressed 'with the whole of the philosophical theory of the value of ideological superstructures.' (4§37: PN 176) Moreover, this early note was immediately followed by a note with the title, 'Relations between structure and superstructures', that started with the laconic statement: 'This is the crucial problem of historical materialism, in my view.' (4§38: PN, 177) It did not replace praxis as the fundamental philosophical question of historical materialism, however, but closely overlapped with it as the two investigations informed each other. This second investigation helped him give a concrete social and historical form to Croce's speculative formulation of the question of the unity of theory and practice. At the same time, the first investigation helped him re-formulate the question of the interaction between structure and superstructures in a manner fundamentally informed by the concept of praxis as derived from the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Indeed it has been noted that Gramsci read Marx's famous *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* in light of the *Theses on Feuerbach* (Frosini 2004, 103), not as a departure from them and affirmation of a new interpretation of history allegedly distinguishing

the old from the young Marx. This is in keeping with his project to reconstruct Marxism, including its social science, starting from its philosophical foundations.

Two points are especially important here regarding the way in which the two investigations informed each other. The first point is that Gramsci emphasized the mutual interaction and ultimate unity in the historical process of structure and superstructures. The notion of praxis as the unity of theory and practice acquired a concrete social and historical formulation in the theory of the interaction between superstructures and structure respectively. In this context, Gramsci used the concept of 'historical bloc' to describe the necessary complementarities between structure and superstructures and their ultimate unity in the historical process. The basic point made by Labriola, and extended or elaborated on by Gramsci, is that in fact one cannot be conceived without the other and that in Marxist theory they are only differentiated for purposes of analysis (Zangheri 1999, 163). The second point is that, in addressing the interaction between structure and superstructures and their ultimate unity in the concrete historical process, Gramsci came to emphasize political activity, besides empirical science, as integral to the concept of praxis and indeed central to it. It is not just that politics became so central to the concept of praxis that one might talk of a philosophy or sociology of 'political praxis' (Salamini 1981). Rather, more specifically, politics acquired a pivotal role in the process of interaction between structure and superstructures. Politics became the first moment in which the structure was elaborated into superstructures and reacted upon it, ensuring their unity in a conflictual process.

Gramsci came to emphasize the mutual interaction and ultimate unity of structure and superstructures in his engagement with Croce. The first and philosophically more basic consideration in this engagement involved Croce's criticism that Marxism had restored theological dualism by making the structure of society into a transcendental concept over and above history. In an extensive re-working of an earlier note (7§1) Gramsci addressed this criticism and also added his own criticism regarding Croce's dialectic of distinctions. Indeed, if one started from interpretations of Marxism that adopted metaphysical materialism as

their philosophical foundation and made every development in history the result of independent developments in the material base of society, the latter would be effectively a separate transcendental entity over and above the historical process and in fact driving it. In Croce's criticism, the structure would thus be for all intents and purposes a materialist version of the notion of an 'unknown god' driving history. But this is not an accurate characterization of the philosophy of praxis, Gramsci objected:

> Croce's statement that the philosophy of praxis "detaches" the structure from the superstructures, thus effectively reinstating theological dualism and positing an "unknown god-structure" is not accurate and it is not a profound invention either. The accusation of theological dualism and of breaking-up the process of the real is empty and superficial. It is strange that this accusation should come from Croce, who has introduced the concept of dialectic of distinctions and who has thus been continuously accused by Gentile's supporters precisely of having broken-up the process of the real. (10ii§41i: QC, 1300)

Expanding on his earlier observation, Gramsci went on to point out that Marxism was based on the concept that 'the process of the real' was characterized by an intimate unity stemming from the mutual inter-relation between structure and superstructures that was already foreshadowed in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. In this context the concept of historical bloc is invoked by Gramsci to characterize this mutual inter-relation and unity.

> Is the structure conceived as something static and absolute or is it not rather [conceived as part of] moving reality itself and does not the statement of the *Theses on Feuerbach* that "the educator has to be educated" posit a necessary relationship of active reaction of man on the structure, asserting the unity of the process of the real? The concept of "historical bloc" constructed by Sorel captured in full precisely this unity asserted by the philosophy of praxis. (QC, 1300)

Thus for Gramsci the philosophy of praxis does not put the structure over and above society, but conceives of its development as closely inter-related with that of the superstructures and characterized by the 'active reaction of man on the structure'.

This consideration on the mutual interaction between structure and superstructures, derived from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, went to add to and complement another consideration that Gramsci had made in response to yet

another criticism aimed by Croce at Marxism. Croce had criticized the philosophy of praxis by imputing to it the claim that superstructures were mere appearances. Gramsci rejected this criticism already in his review of Croce's ethico-political history, the historiographical paradigm that informed his *History of Europe* and *History of Italy*. Ethico-political history, Gramsci responded, ought to be concretely understood as the 'moment' of hegemony, which recognizes the independent importance of superstructural factors such as culture in history but, unlike Croce's ethico-political history, does not reduce the whole of history to such factors alone.

> The most important problem to be addressed in this paragraph is the following: whether the philosophy of praxis excludes ethico-political history, that is, [whether] it does not recognize the reality of a moment of hegemony, [whether] it does not give importance to moral and cultural leadership, *really judging superstructural phenomena as [mere]"appearances"*. We can say not only that the philosophy of praxis does not exclude ethico-political history, but that its most recent phase of development consists precisely in the appropriation of the moment of hegemony as an essential [component] of its conception of the state and in the recognition of the value of cultural phenomena, of cultural activity, of a cultural front [that is deemed to be] necessary alongside the merely economic and merely political [fronts]. … *The philosophy of praxis will critique as unwarranted and arbitrary the reduction of [all] history to ethico-political history, but will not exclude the latter*. The opposition between Crocean idealism and the philosophy of praxis is to be sought in the [purely] speculative character of Crocean idealism. (10i§7: QC, 1224, my emphases)

Thus superstructures are definitely not considered as mere appearances by the philosophy of praxis, which recognizes their power in the making of history. But they ought to be considered alongside the structure or the economy in the making of history. What is missing from Croce's histories is precisely the concept of 'historical bloc', which emphasizes the complementarities and interaction of structure and superstructures in history.

> Ethico-political history, in so far as it does without the concept of historical bloc in which socio-economic content and ethico-political form are concretely identified in the reconstruction of various historical periods, is nothing but a polemical presentation of more or less interesting philosophical constructions, it is not history. In natural sciences it would be equivalent to reverting to classifications of animals by the color of the skin, feathers, or fur, rather than by anatomical structure. (10i§13: QC, 1237-8)

In another passage, on political ideologies, Gramsci addressed in greater depth Croce's criticism that Marxism reduced the superstructures to mere appearances (10ii§41xii: QC, 1319), mere reflections of the structure of society, which constituted the only and true reality. Here too he concluded that structure and superstructures ought to be considered in conjunction with each other in the making of history. Gramsci objected to Croce's criticism by pointing out that in fact for Marxism the superstructures were an integral part of reality, with the effective power to react upon the structure. Ideologies, Gramsci pointed out, are 'real historical facts' (QC, 1319). In particular, he went on to highlight, the whole of the superstructures constitute a real historical force because human (political) activity is unthinkable without the superstructures. Key to this argument is Marx's claim that men become conscious of their tasks on the terrain of ideologies, derived from the famous *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*.

> For the philosophy of praxis superstructures are an objective and operative reality (or become such [a reality] when they are not purely individual elaborations); it explicitly asserts that men acquire consciousness of their social position and therefore of their tasks on the terrain of ideologies, which is no small assertion of their reality; the philosophy of praxis itself is a superstructure, it is the terrain on which determinate social groups acquire consciousness of their social being, of their strength, of their tasks, of their becoming. (QC, 1319)

Indeed any class for itself has acquired consciousness through (its) ideology, intellectuals and related institutions. Any coordinated, collective activity effectively presupposes a minimal ideological and political apparatus. Gramsci invokes once again the concept of 'historical bloc' to describe this unity between structure and superstructures.

> The concept of the concrete (historical) value of superstructures in the philosophy of praxis must be studied in depth associating it with the sorelian concept of "historical bloc". If men acquire consciousness of their social position and their tasks on the terrain of the superstructures, this means that there is a vital and necessary connection between structure and superstructure. (QC, 1321)

Political ideologies and ultimately the whole of political activity acquire a pivotal role in this scheme. First, and most obviously, political ideologies acquire a pivotal role influencing the whole of the superstructures. Indeed the note that had first introduced the concept of praxis (4§37) had begun by considering

precisely Marx's dictum that men acquire consciousness of their tasks on the terrain of ideologies, suggesting that this observation went to the very heart of the production of knowledge in general. Gramsci re-drafted it emphasizing even more clearly the question as to how to interpret Marx's dictum.

> The question of the "objectivity" of knowledge according to the philosophy of praxis can be developed starting with the proposition (contained in the preface to the *Critique of political economy*) that "men become conscious (of the conflict between material forces of production) [sic] on the ideological terrain" of juridical, political, religious, artistic, philosophical forms. But is this consciousness limited to the conflict between material forces of production and relations of production – as per the letter of the text – or does it refer to any conscious knowledge? This is the point to develop and that can be [developed] with the whole of the philosophical doctrine of the value of superstructures. (11§64: QC, 1492)

Gramsci's answer to this question was that other forms of knowledge, besides that of a conflict between forces and relations of production, were also the object of the consciousness acquired on the ideological terrain, in and through hegemony.

In Notebook 10 the answer is expressly and unequivocally given vis-à-vis Croce and Lenin, who was considered by Gramsci as the initiator of the theory of hegemony. Here Gramsci states that Marx's dictum that men acquire consciousness of the conflict between forces and relations of production on the terrain of the superstructures had 'gnoseological value', that is, it pertained to the acquisition of knowledge in general (10ii§12: QC, 1249). Indeed all knowledge was affected by struggles for hegemony, according to Gramsci, because a fundamental reform in the ways of knowledge was brought about by successful hegemonic projects. Thus Lenin, by advancing the theory and practice of politics, had brought about a philosophical progress too. This was because 'the realization of an hegemonic apparatus, in that it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and the methods of knowledge, it is [therefore] a knowledge matter, a philosophical matter.' (10ii§12: QC, 1249-50) Hence the pivotal role of politics vis-à-vis the entire superstructural construction, in addition to and partial replacement of the role of empirical science – which Gramsci had described just as a 'fundamental cell' – in guaranteeing the unity of theory and practice within complex social structures.

A concrete example of the resulting centrality of politics, because of the way in which changes in the ideological terrain ultimately affect all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is given by Gramsci in the context of a discussion of scientific instruments and their importance for scientific progress. Gramsci criticizes the claim, which he imputes to Bukharin, that scientific progress can be explained by material progress alone, understood as the progress of the material instruments of production. 'The principal "instruments" of scientific progress are of the intellectual (*and also political*) kind' (11§21: QC, 1421, my emphasis), Gramsci argued. 'How much did the banishment of the authority of the Bible and of Aristotle from the scientific field contribute to the progress of [natural] sciences? And was not this banishment due to the general progress of society?' Gramsci asked. He went on to suggest that a correct theory about the origins of springs was only finally accepted in the scientific domain by the time of Diderot, although men of the people had long held correct opinions on the matter, because of previous attempts to reconcile what common sense (*buon senso*) had empirically observed with the authority of the Bible and Aristotle on matters of knowledge (QC, 1421).

Second, and most importantly, the whole of political activity acquires a pivotal role in the interaction between structure and superstructures. It is through this activity that the 'vital and necessary connection between structure and superstructure[s]' is realized. This will becomes indeed central to Gramsci's very definition of political science itself, which he defined as the study of the intermediate 'moment' providing the link between the economic and ethical moments in history. It is in this sense that we can understand the otherwise incomprehensible statement that history and politics ought to be identified (10ii§2: QC, 1241-2), that is, as a claim that history cannot be explained without political activity. This conclusion is confirmed by two other notes. Gramsci's reflection on the concept of praxis as found in the three 'Series' on philosophy and in the philosophical notebooks (10 and 11) converges with that in two separate notes outside of the main location of his notes on philosophy, but obviously still connected to it. They are both related to Machiavelli and will

contribute to his definition of political science. The first one was written before the end of 1930, probably just after the note where he first mentions the concept of praxis (4§37). It is a commentary on an interpretation of Machiavelli, in which Gramsci suggests that the Florentine was first and foremost the author of concrete political works, although, Gramsci goes on add, 'he also articulated a conception of the world that could be called "philosophy of praxis" or "neohumanism", in that it does not recognize transcendental or immanent (in the metaphysical sense) elements but is based entirely on the concrete action of man, who out of historical necessity works and transforms reality.' (5§127: PN, 378) In this note Gramsci is reading Machiavelli through a very peculiar lens that he first developed in his reconstruction of Marxism based upon the *Theses on Feuerbach*. What is interesting about this note is that it first associates the thought of the author who was considered the founder of political science in Italy with the philosophy of praxis. Here Gramsci first associates, however indirectly, the notion of praxis with the study of political activity.

In a later note titled 'Machiavelli' that will be redrafted in Notebook 13 – the notebook on Machiavelli and political science – he explicitly points to the need to address the role of political activity within the philosophy of praxis. 'The question: what is politics; that is, what place should political activity occupy in a systematic (coherent and logical) conception of the world, in a philosophy of praxis? This is the first question that has to be resolved in a treatment of Machiavelli…' (8§61: PN, 271) The tentative answer that Gramsci gives at this stage points both to the fact that political activity is one aspect of praxis and also introduces the notion that it plays a key, pivotal, role in the interaction between structure and superstructures. Addressing Croce's dialectic of distinctions again, Gramsci points out that

> In a philosophy of praxis, *wherein everything is practice*, the distinction will not be between the moments of the absolute spirit but between structure and superstructure; it will be a question of establishing the dialectical position of political activity as a distinction within the superstructures. One might say that political activity is, precisely, *the first moment or first level of the superstructures*. (PN, 271, my emphases)

The notion that politics is the 'first moment' of the superstructures will be elaborated upon in Notebook 13 and it will be fully addressed in the chapter on political science below. At this early stage it is sufficient to note that this entails including political activity as one aspect of praxis and, in particular, as that aspect that plays a key pivotal role as intermediary between structure and superstructures in their interaction through history.

Conclusion

This centrality of politics in Gramsci's definition of praxis has a counterpart in his definition of human nature, which included the notion of man as a political animal. Before considering Gramsci's definition of human nature, however, let us first recap his definition of praxis and its role in the reconstruction of Marxism. Praxis is the single most important concept in Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism. It is not derived from Gentile's interpretation of Marx's philosophy, but ultimately from Labriola's and, most importantly, from Gramsci's own translation and interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, which engaged chiefly Croce's (mis)interpretation. It is in his engagement with Croce that Gramsci comes to see the central point of Marx's seminal text as asserting not so much the primacy of practice over theory but their unity in the historical process. This had its counterpart in Gramsci's interpretation of the interaction between structure and superstructures, which Gramsci analogously interpreted, in the wake of his interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, as asserting their unity in the historical process. Politics came to have a determining role in this schema and to become the very paradigm of human practical activity in history, over and above traditional Marxist interpretations of human practical activity that exclusively focused on economic production.

3 – HUMAN NATURE

Human nature is another crucial philosophical concept, alongside praxis, in Gramsci's elaboration of Marxism as a philosophy. Just as with praxis, his formulation of human nature is derived from the *Theses on Feuerbach*. But with this last concept Gramsci also significantly expanded Marx's telegraphic formulation as found in this very brief text. Hence it is in discussing human nature, even more than praxis, that Gramsci laid the foundations for his reconstruction of Marxism. Moreover, it is in this discussion that Gramsci arguably made a most original contribution to the philosophical/theoretical foundations of Marxism. He did so in two ways that probe the traditional Marxist definition of human nature as the ensemble of social relations. On the one hand, he interpreted human nature as a historically variable set of needs and capabilities/ possibilities, interpreting the latter as a measure of human freedom, of what human beings can actually achieve at any given point in history. On the other hand, he expanded upon the notion of 'ensemble of social relations' in a way that included the individual, but in a richer, social conception. Gramsci in fact defined this ensemble as involving (1) the individual (2) other men and (3) nature as socially organized for production. Thus for Gramsci the set of needs and capabilities that distinguished men at any point in history stemmed from the relationship between the individual and other men and nature. This expanded definition is crucially important because it has clear methodological implications for social science. Here, in its concern to include the individual in a formulation of human nature as the ensemble of social relations, we see Gramsci's philosophy edge clearly towards the type of approach that today distinguishes Analytical Marxism, rather than cultural studies. It lays the theoretical foundations for the use of methodological individualism in economics (addressed in chapter 5 below) and, in its conception of man as essentially political, it also lays the theoretical foundations for Gramsci's approach to politics (addressed in chapter 6 below).

The argument in this chapter is especially relevant to two points addressed by the thesis, as reviewed in the introduction. First, it is relevant to current philological interpretations of Gramsci's work. These have neglected Gramsci's treatment of human nature and in particular his desire to include an individual component in human nature. Yet it is important to recognize that Gramsci was greatly concerned with the individual, both ethically and methodologically. Ethically, he showed a concern with individual freedom. But this was realized in co-operation with other human beings. Some commentators have reconstructed Gramsci's views exclusively from the premise that he seemed to embrace a fundamentally pessimistic view of human nature, so that 'man, far from being an essentially historical creation, is an inherently anti-social being who must be controlled and coerced to keep his undesirable tendencies in check.' (Moss 1990, 11) But nothing could be further from his views and concerns. The emphasis that Gramsci placed upon discipline and coercion in education was due largely to the view that human behavior, including ethical conduct, is the fruit of socialization and the molding of the individual to live in society, a process that is embroiled in social conflict. This notion is in fact eminently compatible with the Marxian view that human nature is 'essentially adaptable and flexible'. Thus Gramsci is very much part of the Marxist tradition that saw human nature as an historical creation. Furthermore, rejection of the Rousseauian view that human beings are innately good (and that education should be limited to letting this fundamental trait of human nature flourish) entails neither the opposite view that human beings are innately bad and in need of coercion, nor the Hobbesian argument, in totalitarian-Marxist flavor, that the state ought to be the main guarantor of individual restraint.

Other commentators have stressed the generally negative view that Gramsci held of the prospects for the individual (Fattorini 1987, 91) and the fact that in his thought the liberal concept of the individual seems to disappear under the productivist concept of 'collective man' that went hand-in-hand with his interest in Fordism (Ghosh 2001, 22-3). However, upon closer scrutiny, Gramsci's occasional references to 'collective-man' or 'mass-man' (*uomo collettivo o uomo massa*) in opposition to the 'individual-man' (*uomo individuo*)

reveal, not an endorsement of, but a grave concern with modern forms of social conformism that went alongside a rejection of the excesses of fordist methods of production as well as fascist and Stalinist emphasis on state coercion. In his own formulations Gramsci privileged instead a Leonardesque ideal of the all-round individual (Ragazzini 1999, 121, 124-6). Moreover, Gramsci can be argued to have embraced a view of the democratic individual, understood as the real or historically concrete individual socialized to embrace democratic values, while rejecting the notion of the transcendental individual, understood as the abstract and atomistic individual that existed only in theory (Urbinati 1999, 301, 303-8). Methodologically, Gramsci's emphasis upon the individual is important too. Indeed the injunction that one ought to construct a theory that recognized 'the conscience of the individual who knows, wants, admires, creates' as the seat of all social activity had both ethical and methodological implications. The methodological implications are especially important to contemporary debates in Marxism and social theory.

Secondly, therefore, the argument in this chapter is especially relevant to modern efforts to reconstruct Marxism. The concept of human nature occupies an important place in Gramsci's theory of history, as it does in a variety of Marxist theories. Common to these theories is the recognition that Marx embraced a concept of human nature throughout his work and that the *Theses on Feuerbach* – particularly the Sixth Thesis, which seems to equate human nature with the ensemble of social relations – do not in fact constitute a rejection of the concept, marking a watershed between the thought of the young and old Marx (Geras 1983, 29-58; Fromm 1994, 78-9). A source of disagreement relating to the formulation to be found in the *Theses on Feuerbach* concerns the relative importance of 'general' versus 'relative', or biological and timeless versus social and historical, features of human nature. Indeed in early writings like the *Holy Family* as well as in mature works like *Capital*, Marx distinguished between human nature in general – which includes constant or fixed needs such as hunger, changed by culture only in form and direction – and human nature understood in a relative and historical sense –which includes needs created by a particular social

structure (Fromm 1994, 14, 25). Authors differ in their emphasis on the general and invariant features as the true core of the concept of human nature (Geras 1983, 23-5, 112-6) or on the social and historical character of human nature (Sayers 1998, 3-4, 156-7). Gramsci did not attempt to answer this question in detail, but while emphasizing the social and historical character of human nature, he sketched a formulation that introduces some useful distinctions in this debate, chiefly between a purely individual and a social/relational component of human nature.

This has methodological implications too, precisely because Gramsci endorsed a view of human nature which, while emphasizing its social aspects, included also specifically individual ones. The relevance of this key concept to a Marxist theory of history has been questioned. Human nature might include production as a defining characteristic (*homo faber*), but since human beings produce in response to scarcity, not to fulfill their nature, the concept has no explanatory role in the theory of history (Cohen 2000, 356-9, 379). However, a concept of human nature that includes the individual is important for modeling behavior and is thus essential to a theory of history that purports to include within its purview – and to lay the foundations for – social sciences like economics and political science (Cohen 2000, xvii, xxiii). Gramsci's views on human nature are especially important because they paved the way for a cautious endorsement of methodological individualism in social science and ultimately of the notion of *homo oeconomicus* in economics. This is true both of weak methodological individualism and of strong methodological individualism.

Strong methodological individualism is based on a view of atomistic individuals, shorn of social relations, as the bases of social phenomena while weak methodological individualism is based upon a socially rich notion of the individual (Udehn 2001, 346-9). They arguably involve 'thin' and 'thick' descriptions of individuals' behavior respectively. In the case of weak methodological individualism and 'thick' description, relational properties such as power, as well as any properties stemming from social relations more in general, are attributed to the individual. They thus become integral to methodological

individualism (Wright, Levine, and Sober 1992, 111-2). Gramsci's re-formulation of the Marxian definition of human nature as the ensemble of social relations, to include the (atomistic) individual but not limited to it, has the effect of enabling both this richer notion of the individual as well as the barer view of the atomistic individual as a special case in which social relations can be said to be negligible. Contingent upon specific historical circumstances, Gramsci thus supported both models of methodological individualism. As we will see in the chapter on economics (Ch. 5 below), he cautiously endorsed the use of the strong variant of methodological individualism in circumstances in which social relations were negligible, thus to be used as a special case of the weak variant, the one that admits of social/relational properties.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part (1) traces the place of Gramsci's reflection on human nature within the *Prison Notebooks*. This is within his philosophical notes and clearly derives from the *Theses on Feuerbach*. It is in reflecting upon the notion to be found there of human nature as the ensemble of social relations that Gramsci came to define human nature as constituted of three components: a purely individual one, corresponding to the traditional liberal notion of the atomistic individual, and two social/relational components, involving other men and nature as socially organized for production. The second part (2) considers Gramsci's understanding of human nature as a set of needs and capabilities/possibilities. The latter amount for Gramsci to a measure of human freedom in a way that is closely reminiscent of the modern capability approach. The last two parts address the foundations of Gramsci's definition of man as 'essentially political', differentiating it from the Aristotelian notion of man as a *zoon politikon*. The third part (3) addresses the social/relational components of man as essentially political, that is, the components that arise from the two social/relational components of human nature. Human beings are essentially political for Gramsci first and foremost because the pursuit of freedom through the expansion of his capabilities/possibilities requires them to engage in collective action. Indeed for Gramsci freedom is first and foremost a collective pursuit. But there is also a sense in which human beings are essentially political for Gramsci

because of the characteristics of the (atomistic) individual, that is, of the purely individual component of human nature. Indeed in the fourth part (4) we see that Gramsci's theory of the individual personality emphasized the individual's position in a network of social relations and his/her ability to change these relations as an essentially political act. It depended upon some fundamental characteristics of the purely individual component of human nature, of the (atomistic) individual. These were the ability to think and, in particular, the ability to engage in a worldview, such that all human beings could be thought of as philosophers.

3.1 – The Development of the Notes on Human Nature

Just as with the concept of praxis Gramsci did not address human nature in a systematic way, under a specific rubric. His reflections are found scattered in notes addressing the definition of human beings ('what is man?'), or of the (human) Spirit as defined in Croce's neoidealist philosophy, for example. Yet these scattered reflections follow directly from the development of the return to Labriola and the Anti-Croce as a step towards a philosophy of praxis. Just as with the concept of praxis, human nature as understood by Gramsci is an integral part of the return to Labriola and his approach to the reconstruction of Marxism, which emphasized praxis as the starting point. In fact, Gramsci's understanding of human nature is derived directly from the *Theses on Feuerbach*. There is in the First Series on Philosophy a passing reference to the fact that Marxism had denied the notion of a fixed and immutable human nature, or '"man in general"' (4§45: PN, 195). An unequivocally clear reference to the *Theses on Feuerbach* occurs only later, in Notebooks 7 and 10, where Gramsci expressly picks up Marx's notion that human nature is in fact the 'ensemble of social relations'. Thus, for example, Gramsci's rejection of Croce's notion of the (human) spirit opposed to it a historically concrete notion of human nature as the ensemble of social relations. This followed the *Theses on Feuerbach* to the letter by defining human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations' as formulated in the Sixth Thesis, which began by stating: 'Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man.

But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.'

In these later notes, again just as with the concept of praxis, human nature as understood by Gramsci is opposed to interpretations of it based on materialism and idealism. The two references to human nature in Notebook 7 are found in the Second Series of notes on philosophy and although they are not taken up in later drafts and thus remain single draft notes, they reveal Gramsci's reflection on the subject. A note titled 'Materialism and historical materialism' begins by analyzing and rejecting ultra materialist definitions of human nature that reduce the question of what are human beings to such material factors as what men eat. It begins in fact by reviewing Feuerbach's dictum that 'man is what he eats' and degenerations of this view such as those proposed by Bordiga (7§35). It opposes to these views the definition from the *Theses on Feuerbach*: '*That "human nature" is the "ensemble of social relations" is the most satisfying answer*, because it includes the idea of becoming – man becomes, he changes continuously with the changing of social relations – and because it negates "man in general".' (PN, 186, my emphasis) A second, brief note titled 'Examination of the concept of human nature' telegraphically reviews definitions of human nature as 'man in general' that emphasize the notion of equality among all men (7§38) and are thus significant politically, if not analytically, for Gramsci.

The most substantial and interesting notes on the concept of human nature are in Notebook 10, on Croce's philosophy. They even more clearly display the taking of distance from materialism and idealism as well as from Croce's speculative and ultimately theological philosophy. In this respect Gramsci's interpretation echoed the *Theses on Feuerbach* again and especially their argument that idealism and materialism alike remained fundamentally religious in outlook, despite their statements to the contrary. This is evident in Gramsci's critique of Croce's speculative philosophy. In fact, Gramsci criticizes Croce's whole view of human nature (and not just its economic aspect) as far too abstract and attempts to translate it into more concrete language. Thus in an aside at the beginning of Notebook 10 Gramsci wrote: 'if one asserts that "the nature of man

is the spirit" one is asserting that it is "history", that is, *the ensemble of social relations* in the process of [their] development, that is again, the ensemble of nature and history, of material forces and of spiritual and cultural [forces]" (10i§introduction: QC, 1209, my emphasis). It is only in this historically concrete form that Gramsci endorses a concept of human nature, while rejecting Croce's speculative conception. Of the latter, he asks

> *whether the conception of the "spirit" of speculative philosophy is not an up-to-date transformation of the old concept of "human nature" belonging both to transcendental [philosophy] and vulgar materialism*, whether, that is, the conception of the "spirit" is nothing but the old "Holy Spirit" turned speculative. One could then say that idealism is inherently theological. (10ii§13: QC, 1250, my emphasis)

In one respect, however, human nature as interpreted by Gramsci is much unlike the concept of praxis. This is because, in interpreting what Marx exactly meant by the 'ensemble of human relations' Gramsci signally expanded the definition to include the individual, while not being limited to it, as per the spirit of Marx's definition. In fact, the critique of speculative/theological notions of human nature culminated in Gramsci's treatment of this subject in two other notes in Notebook 10 (10ii§48ii; §54) which expand upon Marx's definition by including in human nature three components, namely, (1) the individual, (2) other men, (3) nature. Arguably, the first concerns the (atomistic) individual as traditionally understood in liberal theory, while the second and third describe the social/relational properties that can belong to individuals so endowed. The fundamental point made in both notes is that ethical improvement cannot be considered to be exclusively individual. The attribution to Catholicism of a conception of man as an isolated individual that is made in these passages might be due to a selective reading by Gramsci of Catholic sources (Fattorini 1987, 90). But the most important point made by Gramsci is that, while ethical improvement cannot be conceived of as being *exclusively* individual, it also undoubtedly involves an individual component. More specifically, human nature is explicitly defined as an ensemble of social relations linking the individual to 'other men', that is, other individuals and to nature. In other words, Gramsci interprets the sense of Marx's definition of human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations' to

have been that a specifically social component ought to be added to, not simply to replace, the individual component of human nature. In this approach he anticipated current approaches in social science that seek to move beyond the atomistic notion of a utility-maximizing individual to include at least the social aspect and especially the innate social proclivities of human individuals.

In the first note Gramsci stresses both that there is an individual component ([1]) alongside the social/relational ones and that the resulting synthesis of these social relations is individual. Gramsci dubs this synthesis 'individuality' to distinguish it from the (atomistic) individual component.

> *Man is to be conceived of as an historical bloc [1] of purely individual and subjective elements and [2] mass elements and [3] objective or material elements with which the individual is in an active relationship.* Transforming the external world, the general relationships, entails empowering [*potenziare*] one's self, developing one's self. It is an illusion and a [fundamental] error to think that ethical "improvement" is purely individual: *the synthesis of the constitutive elements of individuality is "individual", but it is not realized and [it is not] developed without an activity towards the external [world], modifying the external relationships, from those involving nature, to those involving other men in various grades*, in the diverse social circles in which one lives, all the way to the maximum relationship, which embraces all of humankind. (10ii§48ii: QC, 1338, my emphases)

The 'external relationships' identified here tie the individual to the other two elements constituting human nature, that is, 'mass elements' and 'objective or material elements'. Gramsci thus gives Marx's definition of human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations' a more concrete meaning that includes the individual while at the same time emphasizing that it moves beyond the conception of man as an isolated individual.

The definition of human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations' that can be divided into different constitutive elements including an individual component is reiterated by Gramsci in the second paragraph mentioned above. This is explicitly titled 'What is man?' and it continues the criticism of Croce's conception of human nature as essentially religious, extending this criticism to all (then) current approaches. What is most interesting for our purposes is the explicit definition of human nature offered by Gramsci in terms of 'a series of active

relations' involving three different elements: the (atomistic) individual, and social/relational components involving other men and nature.

> From the "philosophical" viewpoint what is unsatisfactory about Catholicism is the fact that, despite everything, it poses the source of evil in human beings within the individual, that is, it conceives of man as a well defined and limited individual. All hitherto existing philosophies can be said to reproduce this position of Catholicism, that is, they conceive of man as [an] individual limited to his individuality and [conceive of] the spirit as this individuality. It is on this point that one must [act to] reform the concept of human being. That is, it is necessary to conceive of man as *a series of active relations (a process) in which, if individuality has maximum importance, it is not the only element to take into consideration. The humanity reflected in each individual is composed of diverse elements: 1) the individual; 2) other men; 3) nature.* (10ii§54: QC, 1344-5, my emphasis)

Here too Gramsci, while arguing in line with Marx's approach that human nature cannot be considered as exclusively individual, stresses that 'individuality has maximum importance', thus laying the foundations for both an ethics that takes the individual into consideration and also for a social science that is ultimately based upon the individual, thus effectively endorsing one form or another of individualism.

Overall, this is an effort to expand upon the classical Marxian definition of human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations' by being more specific about what this expression entails. As far as the (inter)relations between the individual and other human beings are concerned, Gramsci also introduces an institutionalist perspective. 'The individual does not enter into relations with other men by juxtaposition, but organically, that is, in that they come to belong to organisms from the simplest to the most complex' (QC, 1345) This participation in social organizations effectively groups the social relations tying the individual to other men and nature into social institutions. 'The societies to which an individual can participate are very numerous, more so than it might seem. It is through these "societies" that the single individual [*il singolo*] belongs to humankind.' (QC, 1346) As far as the (inter) relations between the individual and nature are concerned, Gramsci adopts a more typically Marxian account. Just as the single individual does not relate to other men mechanically, simply by juxtaposition, but by belonging to more or less complex organizations and social institutions, 'so

man does not enter into relation with nature simply, by virtue of the fact that he is himself [part of] nature, but actively, by means of work and technology.' (QC, 1345) Similarly, just like the societies to which men can belong are very numerous and complex,

> so there are multiple ways in which the single individual enters into [inter-]relation with nature, because by technology one must understand not only the ensemble of industrially applied scientific notions that is usually understood [by this expression], but also the "mental" instruments, philosophical knowledge. (QC, 1346)

3.2 – Capabilities/possibilities and the Question of Progress

Gramsci expanded Marx's notion of human nature in one other important respect. Human nature is for Gramsci a set of needs and capabilities that varies historically. Interpreted in this sense, the Marxian definition of human nature as the ensemble of social relations stops being puzzling and makes remarkable sense: human nature understood as a set of needs and capabilities varies historically with the variation of the ensemble of social relations, that is, the relations between the individual and other men in society, and with nature as socially organized for production. The concept of capability/possibility is especially important in this context. Gramsci speaks expressly of possibilities available to people, relating these possibilities to the notion of freedom in a manner that is closely reminiscent of the modern capability approach. He thus diverged from the orthodox Marxist productivist approach. His account does contain elements of the traditional Marxist approach emphasizing the conquest of nature through the development of technology and material forces of production (Fontana 1996, 231, 234). But he also integrated these elements with a view of progress as the advance of freedom that was alternative to Croce's similar formulation. He did so by elaborating on the definition of human nature in a way that included freedom as the means of self-realization. In particular, he introduced the notion of possibility, and ultimately freedom, as a measure of progress. Possibility in Gramsci's thought thus comes to play in relation to progress a role akin to the one that capability plays in relation to development within the modern capability approach: it is a measure of the expansion of freedom, which constitutes the ultimate goal of development or progress (Sen 1999, 18-9, 24-5, 74-6). In so doing Gramsci

suggested a more concrete definition of freedom than Croce's and sought to rescue a modified idea of progress from sentimental speculation about the course of history.

This expansion of the Marxian notion of human nature has the important consequence of avoiding relativism. It allows us to conceive of progress in culturally relative terms but at the same time to have a yardstick by which to define and measure progress. This is essential. In fact, Marxian (and Gramscian) historicism comes perilously close to historical relativism with the formulation of human nature as the ensemble of social relations. Indeed if we emphasize the historically variable character of human nature we lose an important yardstick by which to distinguish the mere passage of time from historical progress. Answering that different historical stages – capitalism vis-à-vis feudalism, for example – are progressive relative to each other (Sayers 1998, 118-9) implicitly appeals either to some form of historical teleology whereby the later stage is inherently a higher stage than previous ones, or to ideals of 'equality and liberty' whereby one stage can be legitimately deemed a progress compared to the others, even if the latter ideals have emerged and/or been codified only in the later stage. There must need be, and arguably in Marx's theory there were, transhistorical evaluative standards defined by a common human nature and either the associated fundamental physiological needs (Geras 1995, 153-4) or the associated traits which lead human beings to strive for self-realization and reciprocity in interaction (Eagleton 1999, 159-60). Gramsci, while silent on the question of physiological needs, did address the general need for transhistorical evaluative standards while addressing the definition of progress, and in the process also defined human nature as a set of needs and capabilities/possibilities.

Gramsci made one explicit, though passing, reference to the concept of needs. The 'so-called *Homo Oeconomicus*', Gramsci pointed out, is essentially an 'abstraction of human needs' (10ii§27: QC, 1265). But it is especially the concept of possibility that is set out by Gramsci in a paragraph-length passage within one note in Notebook 10 (10ii§48ii). The first paragraph of this note is concerned with the distinction between progress and the idealist concept of historical 'becoming'

(*divenire*) and, most importantly, with the crisis of modernity that some critics saw in the perceived effort to substitute historical 'becoming' for progress. Gramsci offered both an altogether different take on the crisis and a concrete definition of progress that he explicitly related to his definition of human nature. His discussion took a stance against the pessimistic views of progress (and the enlightenment heritage more generally) expressed by the neoclassical poet-philosopher Leopardi. Gramsci's stance was reminiscent of Croce's, who had dismissed Leopardi's views as sentiment rather than philosophy, although Gramsci's own position might seem 'far from unambiguous' because at the same time he acknowledged the crisis of modernity that gripped his own generation of intellectuals (Russo 1982, 154). Moreover, the language of 'potentiating the self', 'vital impulse' and 'possibility' in several passages in this paragraph might be seen as a return of Bergsonian vocabulary in Gramsci's work that sits uncomfortably alongside a class-based analysis of progress as an ideological construct (Russo 1982, 161-2). But in fact the whole paragraph is concerned with clarifying the concept of progress as a workable, concrete, even social-scientific concept and rescue it from contemporary doubting that looked back to Leopardi for legitimation. It is an effort to ground progress in a notion of freedom that is very distant from abstract Bergsonian voluntarism.

Far from dismissing the concept of progress as hopelessly outmoded or as only an ideological construction, Gramsci considered what measurable evaluative standards it could concretely be based on. The concept of progress, he observed, presupposes 'the possibility of a *quantitative and qualitative measurement: more and better*.' It thus presupposes a '*fixed or fixable [unit of] measure*, but this measure is given by the past, by a certain phase of the past, or by certain measurable aspects etc.' (10ii§48ii: QC, 1335, my emphases) What measure could possibly be associated with progress? The answer lies in the very origin of the concept, whose birth and development coincided with the conscious recognition of the achievement of 'a certain relationship between society and nature (including in the concept of nature that of chance and "irrationality") whereby men, taken as a whole, are more secure in their future, can "rationally" conceive

complete life-plans.' (QC, 1335) Leopardi evoked volcanic eruptions as an image of uncontrollable natural forces, Gramsci observed, but in the past there were more numerous and more serious threats from harvest failures and epidemics that to some extent have been brought under human control. The central concern of Gramsci's definition, here, is not just control over nature however, as he signally included under nature 'chance' and 'irrationality'; it is control over human life itself, that is, ultimately, freedom, if by freedom we understand the ability to rationally plan one's life without being at the mercy of events.

Gramsci explicitly put this definition of freedom at the heart of human nature, as a yardstick of progress. The measurable evaluative standard related to human freedom consisted in the notion of possibility. In reply to the musings by poet/critic Aldo Capasso, who lamented the impossibility of measuring any improvement across history once the idealist concept of 'becoming' had rejected teleology and the notion of an ultimate endpoint (*un ultimo gradino stabile*), Gramsci expanded the concept of human nature beyond the 'ensemble of social relations' in a bid to avoid historical relativism. He did so by including within it the concept of freedom and of 'conditions of life', that is, the quantifiable 'extent to which man dominates nature and chance'.

> The fundamental question is [always] the same: what is man? what is human nature? If we define man as individual [only], these problems [associated with the definition] of progress and becoming are insoluble or remain purely verbal. But if we conceive of man as the ensemble of social relations it appears that any comparison between men across time is impossible, because [we are] dealing with different, if not altogether heterogeneous, things. However, because man is also the ensemble of his conditions of life, one can quantitatively measure the difference between past and present, because one can measure the extent to which man dominates nature and chance. *Possibility is not reality, but it is itself a [virtual] reality: that human beings can do or not do something has its importance to evaluate what is actually done. Possibility means "freedom". The extent of freedom [la misura delle libertà] belongs to the concept of man.* That there are the objective possibilities of not dying of starvation and that [nevertheless] people should die of starvation has its importance… (10ii§48ii: QC, 1337-8, my emphasis)

An essential argument in this passage is that if we consider human nature only as the 'ensemble of social relations' it is impossible to assess historical progress, but that human nature is also the 'ensemble of conditions of life' and that the latter are related to 'possibility' concretely understood as whether men 'can do or not do

something' and thus ultimately to the 'extent of freedom'. It is in this respect that Gramsci's definition of human nature comes close to the modern capability approach.

3.3 – Man as Essentially Political I: the Social/relational Components

Gramsci's definition of man as a political animal follows directly from the two points just made regarding his definition of human nature – that it is the ensemble of social relations and that this ensemble constitutes a set of needs and capabilities that were the very foundation of human freedom. Man for Gramsci is 'essentially political' because the pursuit of freedom, understood as the expansion of his capabilities, was a fundamentally political endeavor involving the organization and mobilization of the ensemble of social relations. The second component of Gramsci's characterization of this ensemble, the social component, the component involving 'other men', thus becomes crucial to his notion of man as 'essentially political'. This is in line with Marx's definition of man's 'species being' as fundamentally historical and is thus remarkably different from the Aristotelian *zoon politikon*, which was arguably based upon an essentialist view of the human species (Margolis 1992, 336). Tellingly, Gramsci does not use the expression 'political animal' in characterizing human beings, but prefers the locution that man is 'essentially political'. This is in line with his rejection of the view that there are biological determinants of human nature, that human beings can be characterized chiefly as animals. For Gramsci, in fact, the notion of man as essentially political is perfectly compatible with the definition of human nature as the (historically determined) ensemble of social relations and is actually derived from it. Perhaps it can be argued that Gramsci's definition of man as pre-eminently political is still close to the Aristotelian notion in so far as it is the ground for community and society, although Gramsci adds to it the explicit view that political life is essentially conflictual (Fontana 2002, 158, 162-5). This might well be so. However, Gramsci's notion of man as essentially political entailed much more than the recognition that human beings are fundamentally sociable

and meant to live in community. It suggested that the very pursuit of human freedom is a collective endeavor.

His treatment of the social component of human nature reflects these considerations. As Gramsci pointed out, 'it is a commonplace that man cannot be conceived of other than as living in society, nevertheless not all the necessary conclusions, even at the individual [level], are drawn from it' including, we should add, conclusions regarding the collective pursuit of freedom through the expansion of human capabilities. Gramsci himself went on to add to this a characteristically Marxian consideration regarding also the third or natural component of human nature: 'another commonplace is that a determinate human society presupposes a determinate society of things and that human society is only possible in that there exists a determinate society of things.' (10ii§54: QC, 1346) The very characterization of nature as a 'society of things' in this passage points to the social and ultimately political dimension of Gramsci's conception. Nevertheless, there is no paean to collective productive powers in the *Prison Notebooks*. Indeed the centrality of society to Gramsci's conception has two aspects. One involves the enormous demands of society and its effects in ultimately shaping human nature. Here we find a shared concern with Freud for the demands of civilization on human beings that anticipates the Foucaldian concern with discipline. The other aspect of Gramsci's conception, however, involves the necessity of this discipline for the collective pursuit of freedom. Society is a source of both demands and capabilities.

Social demands are very marked for Gramsci. Indeed, they are so marked that they mold human nature through history and he thus rejects – perhaps too starkly – the notion of unchanging biological determinants of human behavior, thus ultimately rejecting the view that a human being can be characterized chiefly as an animal. One part of this process of molding is purely cultural and involves the shaping of preferences and beliefs that guide human action. The effects of society in forcing some form of conformism on individuals are especially marked for the common man. In a passage that echoes the Weberian conception of status groups, Gramsci observed that, by virtue of one's worldview, one always belongs

to a group that shares that worldview, one is thus always a 'collective-man' or 'mass-man' ('si è sempre uomini-massa o uomini-collettivi'). This worldview, he implied, is automatically imposed by the group (11§12: QC, 1375-6). Unlike with the professional philosopher, the diffusion of a worldview among the masses, although helped by its own logical coherence, is in fact sustained essentially by the fact that it is lived as an article of faith, that it is essentially a form of conformism to the group (QC, 1390-1).

Another part of the process of molding of human nature goes deeper and affects men at the level of fundamental psycho-physical habits, or the 'second nature' of man, as it is known in Marxian discourse. Gramsci's rejection of an exclusively biological definition of human nature was made partly on theoretical grounds. He differentiated, in fact, between the process of abstraction from a determinate economic activity, which is at the heart of economic thought, and the search for a biological minimum common denominator, an altogether different process, which he calls 'generizzazione' to distinguish it from the 'astrazione' which is at the basis of the construction of ideal types in economic science (10ii§32i: QC, 1276). But the rejection was also made on the grounds that the economy molded man at a very deep level. In arguing that the notion of *homo oeconomicus* is an historical or superstructural construction, rather than a biologically given fact, Gramsci suggested that 'an exchange economy modifies physiological habits [*abitudini fisiologiche*] and the psychological scale of tastes and ultimate utilities [*gradi finali d'utilità*], which thus appear as "superstructures" and not as primary economic data, the object of economic science.' (10ii§32i: QC, 1276) Here not only the notion of 'utilities' is socially constructed, but also the very 'physiological habits' of men. Indeed in Notebook 22, on Americanism and Fordism, Gramsci suggested that in America the rationalization of industrial production determined 'the necessity to elaborate a new human type, conforming to the new type of work and productive process'. (22§2: QC, 2146) Industrialism struck deep at the human psycho-physical constitution. 'The life of industry requires a general apprenticeship, a process of *psycho-physical adaptation* to determinate work conditions, [as well as] nutrition,

lodging, customary, etc. [conditions] which is not something innate, [something that is] "natural", but requires to be acquired' (22§3: QC, 2149, my emphasis).

It is not clear whether Gramsci fully recognized a fundamental biological substratum that was molded by society through history. Where Gramsci explicitly addressed materialistic/biological definitions of human beings it was with an eye to their political significance as a statement of equality, not as a factor in historical explanation. There was a parallel development, Gramsci noted, between modern democracy and some forms of 'metaphysical materialism' such as the one advocated in eighteenth century French materialism with 'the reduction of man to a category of natural history, the individual of a biological species, distinguished [from other men] by natural endowment, not by social and historical qualifications; in any case essentially equal to his fellow human beings.' (10ii§35: QC, 1280) Idealism, Gramsci remarks in this context, put forward a similarly egalitarian claim by arguing that all men share essentially the same intellectual faculties, the same ability (and need) to engage with a philosophy or worldview (QC, 1280-1).

Certainly, he thought that this process of molding ran very deep and, like Freud and anticipating Foucault, he expressed concern at the harshness of its disciplinary aspect.

> The history of industrialism has always been (and it is becoming today in a more accentuated and rigorous fashion) a continual struggle against the "animal" element in man, an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugation of (natural, that is animal-like and primitive) instincts to ever newer, more complex and rigid norms and habits of order, of exactness, of precision which render possible the ever more complex forms of collective life that are the necessary consequence of the development of industrialism … the selection or "education" of the man adapted to the new types of civilization, that is to the new forms of production and work, has taken place with the employment of unheard-of brutality, throwing into the hell of the underclasses the weak and the refractory [elements], or eliminating them altogether (22§10: QC, 2160-1)

The process of molding of human nature was not limited to modern industrialism either, but had a very long history. Habits that today might be perceived as 'animal-like' and thus natural might in fact be part of this long historical process.

> Even the instincts that today have to be overcome as still too "animal-like" in reality have been a notable progress over yet more primitive, preceding ones: who could describe the "cost" in human lives and painful subjugation of instincts, of the passage from nomadism to settled agricultural life? The first forms of slavery and work bondage are part of it. (QC, 2160-1)

The most important contribution of Freudianism was for Gramsci precisely in the recognition and the study of the morbid consequences of 'any construction of a "collective man", of any "social conformism", of any new level of civilization'. (15§74: QC, 1833)

However, if living in society brought enormous pressures to bear on human beings, it also offered them matching capabilities/possibilities. These capabilities were of two types: economic and political. Economic production was one field in which the benefits of society were evident. In various passages Gramsci embraced the traditional Marxian (and Smithian) account of the benefits of the growing division of labor. Since human nature is the ensemble of social relations, the productive capacities available to an individual derive from their inter-relation with other human beings in a given stage of the division of the labor. Gramsci clearly acknowledged this in a discussion of Bukharin's way of accounting for the fact that society is more than the mere sum of individuals composing it. Gramsci invoked in this context the explanation given by Marx in the *Critique of Political Economy*, 'where it is demonstrated that in the factory system there is a production quota which cannot be attributed to any single worker but [belongs] to the ensemble [*l'insieme*] of the workers [*maestranze*], to the collective man.' (11§32: QC, 1446) It is important to recognize therefore the social component of human nature understood as a set of needs and capabilities. 'The "individualism" which has become ahistorical today is that which manifests itself in the individual appropriation of wealth, while the production of wealth has been ever more socialized.' (15§29: QC, 1784) Classical, including Aristotelian, notions that full citizenship belonged only to property owners, that is, to the middle classes and upwards, was an implicit recognition that 'human "nature" was not inside the individual, but in the unity of man and material forces [of production]' (15§29: QC, 1785).

Politics was the other field in which the benefits of society were evident for Gramsci. The possibilities offered by concerted political action held the key to human freedom, as much as, if not more than, those offered by production. The pursuit of freedom is a collective pursuit, not a merely individual one. It is in this sense that Gramsci concluded the paragraph on progress and historical 'becoming' by pointing to the political nature of man. 'Therefore it can be said that man is essentially "political" because the activity to transform and consciously lead other men realizes his "humanity", his "human nature".' (10ii§48: QC, 1338) In fact much historical change is unimaginable without the quintessentially political ability to engage in collective action. One might observe that what each individual can achieve in the way of historical change is little or nothing, judging only by their means ('forze'). However, this is not necessarily so. 'Because the single individual can associate with all those who want the same change and, if this change is [historically] rational, the single individual can multiply themselves by an imposing number of times and achieve a rather more radical change than might seem possible at first sight.' (10ii§54: QC, 1346)

Both types of capabilities as described by Gramsci, but especially political ones, raise the question of the relationship between individual and society in history. His numerous references to 'collective-man' and the 'mass element' of human nature do not point to a disregard, let alone disrespect, for the individual. On the contrary, the individual plays a central role in his theory of history because man is essentially political and avails himself of the possibilities offered by society, as well as suffering its demands. The (inter)relations between the individual and other human beings, as well as between these two elements of human nature and the third element – nature – are thus central to his theory of history.

> It is necessary to elaborate a doctrine in which all these [inter-]relations are active and in movement, clearly stating that the seat of this activity is the conscience of the individual who knows, wants, admires, creates, in that he already knows, wants, admires, creates etc. and *conceives of himself not as an isolated [individual], but full of possibilities offered to him by other men and by the society of things*, of which he cannot but have a certain knowledge (QC, 1346, my emphasis)

3.4 – Man as Essentially Political II: the Purely Individual Component

Gramsci's definition of man as essentially political also had a purely individual component. As the last passage implies, in fact, Gramsci was committed to methodological individualism. Ultimately, the seat of all the activity involving the ensemble of social relations was the individual. Indeed it has long been noted that Gramsci believed it was both possible and desirable to give a 'molecular' or individual-level explanation of at least some 'collective' or social phenomena (Ragazzini 1987, 301-4; Filippini 2007, 39-40). This raises the question as to whether there were any characteristics at the level of the (atomistic) individual that enabled him/her to engage in collective action. Gramsci answered that there were and went on to identify them with the ability to think and engage with a worldview. The latter was a fundamental feature of all human beings, all of whom could be considered as philosophers. But Gramsci did not limit himself to characterizing human beings as *homo sapiens* in an intellectual/philosophical rather than biological sense. Rather, the observation that all human beings are philosophers led him back to the characterization of man as 'essentially political'. The passage was mediated by his reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and his theory of the personality. Together, they led him to the conclusion that the true philosopher is (also) a 'political man'. Gramsci indeed subscribed to a view of the individual as fundamentally political and sociable (Filippini 2007, 37-8, 40). The point here is that such a view was not necessarily a throwback to an essentialist view of human nature as a set of specific characteristics inherent in each and every individual, but followed from Gramsci's theory of the personality.

Despite his rejection of any notion of 'man in general' Gramsci did apparently end up endorsing a (limited) essentialist definition of what it is to be human. Thinking, most of all, distinguished human beings. Indeed the ultimate seat of all social activity was '*the conscience* of the individual who knows, wants, admires, creates' (my emphasis). Thinking was effectively the most basic and distinguishing feature of human beings, something that transpires from the special meaning and place that Gramsci accorded to philosophy. Undoubtedly, human beings for Gramsci are distinguished by their intellectual faculties as much as by

anything else. This emerges in his writings on intellectuals. All work entails a 'minimum of creative intellectual activity' so that, Gramsci concludes, 'all men are intellectuals' (12§1: QC, 1516). Furthermore, in their lives, whether at work or outside, 'every man participates in a worldview' so that 'one cannot separate homo sapiens from homo faber.' (12§3: QC, 1550-1) Participation in a worldview requires specific intellectual faculties and Gramsci asserts, in particular, that every man is a philosopher (10ii§54: QC, 1346). He took this view from Croce, but gave it a specifically socio-historical justification or origin. For Gramsci, in fact, the statement that every man is a philosopher entails that everyone possesses the basic intellectual faculties that allow him/her to interact with other human beings and with nature.

The statement that every man is a philosopher entails that everyone has the basic intellectual faculties to live in society and interact with other human beings. There is a linguistic component to the argument. In the lengthy introductory paragraph to the main body of Notebook 11, titled 'Introduction to the study of philosophy', Gramsci states that all men are philosophers because a worldview is implicit in language, common sense and popular religion (11§12: QC, 1375). The basic need to communicate with other human beings involves the use of a shared medium, language, that is by no means neutral, but involves evaluations and specific perspectives on the world. Language in fact involves a worldview and those who use language are thus forced, consciously or otherwise, to engage this worldview. There is also a normative or ethical component to the argument. Gramsci argued that every man is a philosopher because of the kind of knowledge and thinking that are required to live in society and interact with other men. 'The majority of men are philosophers', Gramsci argued, because in their behavior there are implicit norms of conduct, or behavioral norms (10ii§17: QC, 1255) which are often validated by a religion, if not a philosophy. Both religion and philosophy, as pointed out by Croce, have 'conforming morals' or norms of conduct (10ii§31: QC, 1269-70).

The statement that every man is a philosopher also entails that everyone has the basic intellectual faculties to interact with nature and ultimately with the

world at large. Gramsci in fact identified philosophy with the kind of thinking that is common to all men and that is a basic intellectual faculty. A professional philosopher differs from any other man only in the greater logical rigor, coherence and *esprit de système* with which he thinks. It is a difference of degree due to training, rather than a basic difference in approach, or a specific technical knowledge that he focuses on. In this respect 'the specialist philosopher is closer to other men than happens with other specialists'. (10ii§52: QC, 1342) This is because the kind of knowledge and thought that is at the heart of philosophy is necessarily shared by all human beings. Refined and specific specialties like entomology focus on specific technical knowledge such that not all men can (or ought to) be thought of as 'empirical "entomologists" … but we cannot conceive of any man who is not also a philosopher, who does not think, precisely because *thinking belongs to man as such*…' (QC, 1342-3, my emphasis).

Gramsci did not stop at this characterization of human beings as *homo sapiens.* Rather, through his reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and his theory of the personality, he came to the conclusion, once again, that man is 'essentially political', since the true philosopher is (also) a 'political man'. This is less surprising than might seem at first. We have seen that the individual component of human nature is indeed central to historical change. This was also because Gramsci extended to individuals Marx's criticism of the materialist argument that human beings are the product of historical circumstances, a criticism which rejected a unilateral causal explanation running from circumstances to human beings by the observation that the educator – in this case, the historical circumstances – had to be educated in its turn. Gramsci analogously wrote against the dangers and theoretical contradictions, as far as historical change is concerned, that arise from a naturalistic view of human nature emphasizing the social environment over and above the individual and any sense of individual responsibility. He thus spoke against

> the fatalistic theory of those groups that share the conception of "naturality" according to the "nature" of brutes[,] and for whom everything is justified by the social environment. Any feeling of individual responsibility is thus dulled and any individual responsibility is thus drowned in an abstract and irretrievable social

> responsibility. If this concept were true, the world and history would be forever static. If in fact the individual, to change, needs the whole society to change before him, mechanically, by who knows what extra-human force, no change would ever occur. *History is instead a continual struggle by individuals and groups to change what exists at any given moment* but in order for this struggle to be effective these *individuals and groups have to feel superior to what exists, [have to feel] educators of society etc*. (16§12: QC, 1878; my emphases)

Gramsci also used the very same metaphor of the educator to refer to the effects of the cultural environment on the individual philosopher, highlighting the pressures exerted on the latter. The personality of the individual philosopher was not limited to his own individual characteristics, but was given by the inter-relation between the individual thinker and the surrounding socio-cultural environment:

> it can be said that the historical personality of an individual philosopher is given also by the active [inter-]relation between him and the cultural environment that he wants to modify, an environment that reacts [back] on the philosopher and, forcing him to a continual [work of] self-criticism, functions as "educator". (10ii§44: QC, 1331-2)

Gramsci further extended the metaphor of the educator also in his critique of Bukharin, who had failed to put the educator, that is, the social environment, in its place (11§22: QC, 1426). Even more importantly, he especially extended the concern with the personality that is evident in the previous passage, with its reference to the 'historical personality of the individual philosopher'. It was through the theory of the personality that Gramsci came to equate the true philosopher with the political man. This, coupled with the definition that all men are philosophers, leads us back to the notion that man is essentially political.

There were many aspects to Gramsci's theory of the personality. It partly arose from personal reflection and in some formulations, at least, it was directly influenced by his own personal predicament. Much can be made of Gramsci's own tragedy and his experience, while in jail, of a progressive, or 'molecular', transformation of his own personality (Cavallaro 2001). Molecular change in individuals, he observed, can result, through imperceptible yet cumulative changes, in the rise of a new personality within the same individual. It is 'a progressive mutation of the moral personality which at a certain point, from quantitative, becomes a qualitative change: that is, we are not in truth dealing with

the same person, but with two [persons].' (15§9: QC, 1762) Yet this observation/reflection is consistent with his sociological definition of individual personality in terms of location within a network of social relations. In this sense (and in this sense alone) his definition of the individual personality did overlap with the original meaning of the Latin term *persona*, which referred to the part played by an individual in a play or, more in general, in any social relationship (Gerratana 1987, 119). This meaning is preserved in the modern English expression referring to an individual's 'public *persona*'. While the individual is necessarily a single physical being, s/he can nevertheless have more than one personality and/or conscience because the latter (personality and conscience) depend upon the multiple inter-relations between the individual and other individuals and nature.

It is the sociological definition of the personality as stemming from individuals' position in a network of social relations that led Gramsci to conclude that the true philosopher is (also) a 'political man'. Building up on his definition of human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations' involving the individual, other individuals and nature, Gramsci pointed out that the relations among these three different elements

> … are not mechanical. They are active and conscious that is, they correspond to the greater or lesser degree of intelligence that the single man has of them. Therefore it can be said that *one changes oneself, modifies oneself, to the extent that they change and modify the whole complex of [inter-]relations of which they are the focal point [centro di annodamento]. In this sense the true philosopher is and cannot be but the political man [il politico]*, that is the active man who modifies the environment, where by environment is understood the ensemble of [inter-]relations in which every single individual comes to participate. *If one's individuality is the ensemble of these relations, to make one's personality means to acquire a conscience of these [inter-]relations, to modify one's personality means to modify the ensemble of these relations* (10ii§54: QC, 1345, my emphases)

Conclusion

Alongside praxis, human nature is a key concept in Gramsci's philosophical reconstruction of Marxism. Both are addressed within his notes on philosophy and both derive from the *Theses on Feuerbach*. But with the concept of human nature even more than with the concept of praxis Gramsci expanded upon the original definition found in Marx's text. In this case, in fact, he significantly expanded

upon Marx's definition of human nature as the ensemble of social relations by stating that it entailed three components: a purely individualistic component consisting in the atomistic individual as traditionally represented in classical liberal theory and two social/relational components consisting in, respectively, the 'other men' and nature, as key constitutive parts of the relations of which the individual was the focal point. Gramsci's definition thus has the virtue of encompassing the traditional liberal notion of the atomistic individual while not being limited to it. As such, it laid the foundations for both his economics and his political science. For his economics, it paved the way for the circumscribed employment of a strong form of methodological individualism as implied in his guarded advocacy of the use of the concept of *homo oeconomicus*. Gramsci endorsed the latter not as a biological minimum common denominator, but as a theoretical abstraction that was approximated in real historical circumstances in which the social/relational component became negligible for scientific purposes. Gramsci's discussion of human nature also laid the foundations for his political science. The latter was in fact conceived by Gramsci as a discipline that emphasized collective pursuits by socially endowed individuals. Indeed his discussion of human nature emphasized that man is a essentially political both because the pursuit of freedom understood as the expansion of human capabilities is an essentially collective pursuit and also because Gramsci's theory of the individual personality emphasized the essentially political ability of the individual to change the set of social relations of which they are the focal point. We should also add that Gramsci's discussion of human nature, by rejecting biological determinants of human behavior, also contributed to demarcating social from natural sciences. This is the sense of Gramsci's expression that man is 'essentially political', rather than a 'political animal'.

4 – NATURAL SCIENCE

At the same time as he began his reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, based in part upon his reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Gramsci also began a reflection on the place and role of natural science within Marxism. This was a reflection geared towards providing a 'better understanding of the basic principles of science' that differentiated itself from an earlier, purely cultural critique of popular misconceptions about science, fostered in Italy by a particular group of intellectuals. The goal of this better understanding was to differentiate philosophy from natural science. Gramsci cautiously and sometimes ambiguously endorsed philosophical realism, the view that valid (scientific) knowledge conforms to an independently existing world that is external to the human mind. His main interest in this philosophical question, however, was in the unambiguous position that he took regarding the contribution of natural science to it: philosophical realism was a conception of the world, that is, an original philosophical stance, not a result proven by natural science itself. The latter did not give an unmediated access to reality as it really is. For Gramsci, in fact, the most fundamental basic principle of science that he sought to get across in his notes was the view that science is fallible though perfectible. Indeed in his critique of common sense Gramsci put forward an alternative, anti-dogmatic and essentially dynamic view of scientific knowledge as fallible but perfectible. Scientific knowledge was caught up in historical development. But what exactly is involved in this development of scientific knowledge? One aspect of this development is the expansion of scientific knowledge, the creation of more comprehensive theories that explain an ever greater number of observed phenomena. Another aspect is the continuous rectification of the material and intellectual instruments of experimental science. A third aspect is the diffusion and universalization of theories. This last process involves the universalization of science itself as the material and intellectual instruments come to be used by the

whole of mankind. It shows that natural science, and experimental science in particular, can and does transcend cultural differences.

The argument of this chapter is relevant to three points as outlined in the introduction to the thesis. First, it is relevant to qualifying views of Gramsci as a cultural or linguistic theorist. Gramsci's writings on natural science have received scant attention and virtually none that attempts to relate them to his overall work. It is perhaps for this reason that we still find these writings used to lay the charge that they exhibit a lapse into subjectivism and antimaterialism (Catone 2008, 108). Moreover, his re-evaluation of the subject, together with Gramsci's 'thick' conception of the individual, led also to a re-evaluation of the attributes of the subject, including his/her culture, in the study of science. It is equally important, however, to qualify this re-evaluation by Gramsci of the subject and his/her culture in the study of science. In the first place, Gramsci did try to incorporate in his theory lessons from idealism and the subjectivist conception of reality, but this was chiefly an emphasis upon active human involvement in the production of knowledge in what was essentially an historical process of development. He did not lapse into subjectivism and antimaterialism, as his position on science and scientific knowledge remained in fact fundamentally realist and materialist too (Morera 1989, 459, 462; 1990, 186), albeit in a historicist sense, in that science, like any other discipline, could not achive perfect knowledge but developed historically (Morera 1990, 45-6, 53, 116). Thus Gramsci's position was neither idealist nor materialist, neither subjectivist nor objectivist, but sought to combine and move beyond these different standpoints in his reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. Secondly and crucially here, for all his emphasis upon culture, Gramsci did not endorse any form of cultural relativism. Science remained for Gramsci a potentially universal discipline that transcended traits of the specific subject such as his/her culture. Indeed he defined experimental science as capable of transcending particular or group-related viewpoints. This universality of results was achieved both by virtue of the reproducibility and verifiability of scientific experiments and by use of (common) material and intellectual instruments. Gramsci further argued that science writ large was

capable of transcending cultural differences, not just by the adoption of common intellectual instruments, but by virtue of its practical results. It is thus crucially important to appreciate that natural science, for all its (culturally specific) material and intellectual instruments as described by Gramsci, was potentially universal.

Second, the argument of this chapter is relevant to current philological interpretations of Gramsci, which have begun to recover his interest in science, alongside his interest in philosophy (Frosini 2003, 79-97). The two went together in the double sense that Gramsci believed both that philosophy played a foundational role vis-à-vis natural science and that natural science had important philosophical – and specifically epistemological – implications. As far as the first point is concerned, Gramsci believed that philosophy and in particular formal logic had a foundational role vis-à-vis natural science in that it was indispensable for the further development of natural science. Gramsci was in fact interested in Bertrand Russell's philosophy and particularly his formal logic. Although Gramsci refused to view formal logic as the whole of philosophy, he nervetheless agreed that logic was a fundamental tool used by several sciences (Cospito 2008b, 752; 2008a) and constituted the indispensable foundation for the further advancement of these sciences. As far as the second point is concerned, Gramsci was particularly interested in the epistemological implications of natural science. It is in this way that I add the most to current philological interpretations of Gramsci, in that I investigate the manner in which his discussion of the objectivity of natural science had important implications for his theory of knowledge, that is, his epistemology. For this investigation, it is important to place Gramsci's discussion of science within the broader context of his reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis.

A more serious charge than the lapse into subjectivism has been raised against Gramsci's writings on science: they show a confusion between the question of the reality of the external world and the question of objectivity (Catone 2008, 106). Indeed, here Gramsci systematically blurs the distinction between two separate questions at the heart of philosophical realism: ontological realism, or the question of the independent existence of the external world; and

epistemological realism, or the question concerning the possibility of obtaining objective knowledge of this world (Morera 1990, 65, 129). However, while these questions are certainly important for Gramsci's work, they are not central to it. We should rather take Gramsci's reflection on science on its own terms and try to understand its role within his overall work. In fact Gramsci was centrally concerned, not so much with defining realism, or combating subjectivism or phenomenalism, as with two other tasks: one involved delimiting the respective roles of philosophy and natural science, according the latter an important part within, not over and above, the philosophy of praxis; the other task involved sketching a modern, historically informed view of natural science as fallible but perfectible and proposed chiefly as an alternative to the premodern, Aristotelian/Thomist, conceptions of reality and knowledge that informed common sense.

The argument of this chapter is relevant to a third point outlined in the introduction, namely, the relation between Gramsci and his contemporaries. It is relevant, first of all, to the relationship between Gramsci and Croce. It is in their different appreciation of natural science that the two stand apart most starkly (Boothman 1994, 172-5). Here it is added that it was in particular experimental science that was central to Gramsci's conception, marking him apart from Croce even more starkly. In this process of distancing himself from Italian neoidealist thought, however, Gramsci did not fall into materialism. In particular, he continued to reject Bukharin's materialist conception. Perhaps the distance between Gramsci and Bukharin is less great than is often assumed, particularly when considering the latter's writings from the mid-1920s, that is, after his 1921 book with the subtitle a *Popular Manual of Sociology*, the 'Saggio Popolare di Sociologia' so harshly criticized by Gramsci (McNally 2011, 365, 375). The evolution of Bukharin's thought might indeed be a way in which the gap between Soviet and Western Marxism was growing smaller. Quite possibly, it had never been unbridgeable. Gramsci's writings on science, however, concentrate on the *Popular Manual* and extend their criticism to Bukharin's contribution to the 1931 London Congress on the History of Science. They reveal a desire to revisit the

whole of Soviet Marxism, to include not just Bukharin, but Lenin himself and even certain aspects of Engels's work (Cospito 2008b, 759-65). Indeed it has been suggested that while in prison Gramsci was effectively taking an heterodox stance on the whole of Soviet Marxism, starting with Lenin (Vacca 2012, 209-11, 219). Here I expand upon this argument in two ways. First, Gramsci's criticism of Bukharin and of Soviet Marxism was part of his effort to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, which involved revisiting the very foundations of Marxist thought. Second, the critique of Bukharin had an aspect that has been neglected so far – it included focusing on his failure to undertake a critique of common sense, a task that, as we have seen, was central to Gramsci's conception of philosophy. It was a task that Bukharin had signally failed at, as in the *Popular Manual* he approached Marxism not as a philosophy but as a science of society based on the model of an antiquated notion of natural science. Gramsci sought to revise this antiquated model and propose a new one that took idealist contributions into account.

Five aspects of this revision are addressed in turn. (1) Science, including natural science, occupies an important place in the notebooks. Gramsci's notes on science, in fact, are an integral part of his effort to reconstruct the Marxist theory of history as a philosophy of praxis. They differentiate themselves quite early from a cultural critique of misconceptions of science to concentrate instead on providing 'a better understanding of the basic principles of science'. (2) A goal of this seach for 'basic principles of science' was to assert the theoretical autonomy of the philosophy of praxis vis-à-vis natural science. In this context, Gramsci rejected both the notion that causality from the natural sciences could be used to explain historical developments and also the notion that natural science could prove philosophical realism. In particular, Gramsci argued that Marxism was a form of philosophical realism that informed scientific research, rather than being proven by it. Natural science does not provide direct access to reality 'as it really is' and should not be fetishistically considered as the sole and true source of knowledge. What did natural science contribute to Marxism, then? (3) Gramsci's position on natural science emerges in the context of his critique of Bukharin and

common sense. It is here that we see Gramsci at work to elaborate those 'basic principles of science', a better understanding of which he felt was so sorely needed. For Gramsci it was essential to move away from a static and dogmatic conception of scientific knowledge, a legacy of medieval Aristotelian/Thomist philosophy, towards a dynamic and historical view of scientific knowledge as fallible but perfectible. (4) This view was particularly applied by Gramsci to experimental science, which also begins to illustrate how science was potentially universal for Gramsci. Indeed experimental science was notable for Gramsci chiefly for its ability to transcend particular or group related viewpoints. (5) He further argued that science writ large was capable of transcending cultural differences, becoming universal both in the concrete sense of being actually universally adopted and in the pragmatic sense that its practical results transcend the specific cultural connotations with which it might be associated.

4.1 – The Development of the Notes on Science

Gramsci's reflection on natural science is concentrated in Notebook 11. This is the only thematic notebook that deals at some length with natural science. The only other notes on natural science and related arguments are notes from the earlier miscellaneous notebooks (Notebooks 1-9), which Gramsci did not bother to copy, three notes in Notebook 10, which actually focus on epistemological questions, and scattered reflections in older miscellaneous notebooks. Important insights can be gleaned from the process by which Gramsci came to concentrate and rework older notes on science in Notebook 11 and from the specific role that the reflection on science came to play in this notebook. One such insight is that Gramsci came to draw a distinction between two different critiques of views on natural science: one critique was purely cultural and concerned only the more or less outlandish misconceptions of science held by certain groups, particularly in Italy; the other critique went beyond the purely cultural aspect and, while not excluding it, also began addressing foundational questions regarding the place of science, including in particular natural science, in the philosophy of praxis. Another insight is that Gramsci clearly saw this last critique as important for the philosophy of praxis itself. For Gramsci, the latter included the foundations for a

theory of natural science, but most importantly he sought to delineate what a proper understanding of natural science had to contribute to the philosophy of praxis. Both critiques, in fact, were ultimately concerned with the ways in which views on natural science had affected the reconstruction of the philosophy of praxis. And with the second critique Gramsci aimed to sketch a proper alternative definition of natural science and its place within, not outside or above, the fundamental theory.

Gramsci's reflection on science in the notebooks can be divided into two broad strands, which developed into the two different critiques. The first strand emerges already in Notebook 1. It clearly shows that the beginnings of the reflection on science – be it natural, economic, or political – coincides with the beginnings of the theory and criticism of intellectuals and their effect on the reception of new ideas, just as it did in the case of the beginnings of Gramsci's reflection on philosophy. Gramsci's criticism of intellectuals included from the very start a focus on their relation to science. A note dating probably from September/October 1929 (1§25) opened the series of notes on Loria and the phenomenon that Gramsci dubbed Lorianism by presenting the professor of economics as a 'perfect exemplar of a series of representatives of a certain stratum of intellectuals from a certain period.' These were 'positivistic intellectuals' intent on 'deepening, correcting, or surpassing Marxism' by the production and popularization of so-called scientific Marxism. They included Enrico Ferri and Arturo (not Antonio) Labriola, both exponents of revolutionary syndicalism. Turati himself, Gramsci surmised, was not immune to the manner of thinking associated with Lorianism, 'a characteristic of a certain type of literary and scientific production in our country' defined by its 'absence of restraint and criticism.' (1§25: PN, 116) Ferri and other positivist intellectuals had been the target of criticism already in the essay on the Southern Question, which foreshadowed Gramsci's theory of intellectuals and hegemony. They had been criticized there for their pseudo-scientific theories on the biological inferiority of southerners as an explanation of the problems of development of the region and the negative effects that these theories had on both nation-wide perceptions of

problems of development and on the possibility of a political alliance between northern workers and southern peasants (Gramsci 1974, 135-6).

From these beginnings a strand of Gramsci's reflection on science took shape that developed quite clearly into a purely cultural critique of the way of thinking associated with a certain type of intellectual. Numerous brief notes on Loria and Lorianism immediately followed the first one and show Gramsci's strong early interest in the topic (for example, 1§30, §31, §32, §36, §37, §41). But soon after, already in Notebook 1, in a note titled 'Lorianism and Graziadei,' he asks what the rationale for the notes on Lorianism really is. These notes focus on the 'eccentric manifestations' of Loria's work—and of Lorianism more in general—with the specific objective of creating a sense of ridicule that would act as a 'pedagogical device' to instill diffidence in intellectual disorder and flights of fancy. Education is the 'best solution' to instill critical thinking, Gramsci remarks, but it is only a long-term solution, especially for the great masses (1§63). These and other notes on Lorianism were later gathered in a dedicated thematic notebook, Notebook 28, in which the opening statement unequivocally emphasizes the cultural focus of the notes that it contains, addressing the 'bizarre aspects of the mentality of a group of Italian intellectuals and therefore of national culture,' which for Gramsci had not been adequately opposed, thus showing a lack of responsibility 'towards the formation of national culture.' A remark added by Gramsci at the end of the first note on Loria (1§25) as he copied it into Notebook 28, frames this critique of Italian culture and intellectuals in the context of a broader crisis of modernity, sarcastically chiding intellectuals, only some of whom 'have noted how fragile modern civilization was,' and this only now, in 1935, after the abominable brutality of Hitlerism had become apparent (28§1: QC, 2326).

This early work left only one clear trace in Notebook 11. It is in a note that emphasizes the importance of a proper understanding of the potentialities as well as the limitations of modern science. This note testifies to the emergence, in Gramsci's work, of an interest in a more serious study of science that develops in conjunction with his interest in the critique/education of common sense. A better

understanding of both the limits and the potentialities of science was needed for Gramsci. In the note on 'Graziadei and Lorianism' Gramsci seized on an observation made by Croce that, if Graziadei's discussion of the theory of surplus value under increasing automatization meant to suggest that scientific and technological advances would ensure plenty for all without the need to work, then it was nothing but an hypothesis regarding a future 'Land of Cockaigne.' Gramsci found this side comment by Croce especially interesting in that it struck 'at a subterranean current of popular romanticism created by the "cult of science," by the "religion of progress," and by the general optimism of the nineteenth century.' (1§63: PN, 171) The theme is taken up again in a later note (4§71) which ended up, virtually unrevised, in Notebook 11 (11§39). Gramsci highlighted here that the greatest ignorance about science went hand-in-hand with an infatuation with it, generating a kind of 'scientific superstition' that manifested itself, among other things, in the expectation of a coming 'Land of Cockaigne,' a land of plenty without the need to work. This infatuation had to be opposed by various means, the most important of which is '*a better understanding of the basic principles of science'* which 'should be disseminated by scientists and serious scholars and no longer by omniscient journalists and know-it-all autodidacts' (4§71: PN, 242, my emphasis). 'People expect "too much" from science,' Gramsci noted, adding in the later note that science is thus 'conceived as a superior witchcraft,' and 'therefore they are unable to appreciate what science really has to offer.' (11§39: QC, 1459) Gramsci also commented on the literary origins and cultural significance of the expression 'Land of Cockaigne' in another note (8§209) titled 'Religion, the lottery, and the opium of the people' which traces it to Balzac and emphasizes its early association, in Italian literature, with the lottery and the dream of a life free from want. This would end up as the opening note in Notebook 16, on culture.

The second strand of Gramsci's reflection on science dates from May-November 1930. It can be traced to the earliest notes (§1-77) in Notebook 4, in the section titled 'Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism. First Series.' It thus begins at the same time as the reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of

praxis and develops in close conjunction with it. Among these early notes, there is only a fragment of a note (4§6) and a brief note (4§73) that look back on the topic of Lorianism. The brief note is just an annotation to include under this rubric a former socialist. By contrast, a number of notes that will later be copied to Notebook 11 open up in this section a theoretical discussion on foundational questions involving science. Here Gramsci is no longer concerned with a cultural critique of misconceptions about science, but with a more sophisticated theoretical critique that begins to sketch out precisely those 'basic principles of science' that Gramsci would later identify as essential to oppose mindless misconceptions and also, as it will become clear, to define the place of natural science within the philosophy of praxis. Thus some notes begin discussing the definition of science and its place vis-à-vis the superstructure (4§7, 4§41). Others, under the rubric 'the technique of thinking,' begin discussing formal logic, which Gramsci would list among 'the instruments of thought' as a key component of scientific progress (4§18, 4§41). Yet other notes begin addressing Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology*, including aspects of it that pertain to technology and science, such as its notion of 'technical instrument' (4§19) or the meaning of 'matter' (4§25).

There is a lull in Gramsci's reflection on science, which does not appear in Notebook 7, in the 'Second Series' of the notes on philosophy. However, this second strand of Gramsci's reflection on science is continued in Notebook 8, in the 'Third Series' of the notes on philosophy. Most importantly, many of the first draft notes on science would go into the making of Notebook 11, where they are distributed across four sections: Section II, which is devoted to Bukharin's exposition of historical materialism, but also addresses related points on science; Section III, which is titled 'Science and scientific ideologies,' builds up on the previous section by sketching the outline of a conception of science that is alternative to Bukharin's; they are followed in Sections IV and V by a discussion of 'The instruments of thought' and the 'Translatability of scientific and philosophical languages' respectively. What all these notes do, but particularly those in Sections II and III, with which I am chiefly concerned below, is take up the challenge of providing 'a better understanding of the basic principles of

science'. This is addressed chiefly vis-à-vis Bukharin and the common sense notions of science and reality which he shared.

4.2 – Philosophy and Natural Science

What was the goal of Gramsci's search for 'a better understanding of the basic principles of science'? A key question regarding natural science emerges in Notebook 4 and continues to guide Gramsci's reflection. It is the question of the exact role of natural science within Marxism. Answering this question becomes the goal of his search. The meaning and significance of this question for Gramsci is evident from the context in which it emerges, that of the three series of 'Notes on philosophy. Materialism and Idealism' and the task that they undertake of reconstructing Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. This task was informed by Labriola's argument about the theoretical autonomy of Marxism, whose philosophical foundations were to be found neither in traditional materialism nor in idealism, but in a fundamentally new standpoint best described as the philosophy of praxis, which interpreted history as the product of human practical activity rather than material factors or ideas. Therefore, attempts to reconstruct Marxism starting only from traditional materialism or idealism were fundamentally flawed. So too were attempts to reconstruct it starting only from natural science.

The second strand of Gramsci's reflection on science, which began and developed within this task of reconstruction, began precisely by emphasizing the theoretical autonomy of Marxism vis-à-vis natural science. The very first note on science in Notebook 4 (later copied as 11§38) remarks that 'to posit science as the foundation of life, to make science a conception of the world, means to relapse into the idea that historical materialism needs to derive additional support from outside itself.' (4§7: PN, 149) Titled 'Superstructures and science,' the note goes on to suggest that science is a superstructure in the sense that it is changeable and not above or outside history; therefore, it cannot be the starting point from which to reconstruct a theory of history but, in fact, it is itself part of a theory of history that seeks to explain developments in knowledge, as well as in human productive capacities. The note 'On orthodoxy' (4§14) states that orthodoxy is to be sought

in the notion that ‘Marxism is sufficient unto itself’ and to construct a ‘whole conception of the world, an entire philosophy’ and ‘a complete practical organization of society’. (PN, 155-6) It was copied to Notebook 11 with the telling insertion: ‘an entire philosophy *and theory of the natural sciences*’ (11§27: QC, 1434, my emphasis).

One aspect of Gramsci’s argument regarding the theoretical autonomy of Marxism concerns historical explanation. The very first note on the *Popular Manual* also addresses the question of autonomy, this time vis-à-vis a sociology that Gramsci thought was modeled on natural science. Reprimanding Bukharin for having failed to ask the fundamental preliminary questions ‘What is philosophy?’ and ‘What was and what is “sociology”?’ it goes on to point out that the latter ‘has become the philosophy of nonphilosophers, an attempt to classify and describe historical and political facts schematically, according to criteria constructed on the model of the sciences, or of certain sciences. In any case, every sociology presupposes a philosophy, of which it is itself a subordinate part.’ (4§13) Another note on the *Popular Manual* (4§25 later copied as 11§30) develops the question of autonomy in terms of differences in the concept of matter. ‘It is clear that in historical materialism, “matter” should be understood neither in the meaning it has derived from the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, mechanics etc. – examine these meanings and their historical developments) nor in the meaning it has derived from the various materialist metaphysics.’ The issue, then, is ‘not matter as such, but how it is socially and historically organized for production.’ (QC, 1442) This means that any effort to transpose explanations or discoveries regarding matter in the natural sciences to human history is fundamentally flawed: ‘the use of the element of causality taken from the natural sciences in order to explain history constitutes a return to the old ideological historiography (idealist and materialist).’ Gramsci gives Bukharin’s suggestion that ‘the new atomic theory destroys individualism (Robinsonades)’ as an example of the mindless effort to transpose discoveries regarding matter in the natural sciences to human history.

> What, in fact, is the meaning of this juxtaposition of politics and natural science? Does it mean that science explains history? Does it mean that the laws of a particular natural science are identical with the laws of history? … In fact, this is just one of the many aspects of the *Popular Manual* that reveal the superficiality of its formulation of the problem of historical materialism and its failure to give to this conception its own scientific autonomy and its proper status vis-à-vis the natural sciences. (QC, 1444)

If Gramsci quickly dismissed the possibility of using concepts and laws derived from natural sciences in historical explanation, he took another aspect of the question of autonomy more seriously and came to structure his discussion of the relation between philosophy and natural science around it. This is the relationship between philosophical realism and natural science. Already in Notebook 4 Gramsci wrote that 'the most important question concerning science is the question of the objective existence of reality … I believe it is a mistake to demand that science as such prove the objectivity of the real; that is a conception of the world, not a scientific datum.' (4§41) This note dates from October-November 1930 according to Francioni's dating, that is, before Gramsci received the volume *Science at the Crossroads*, containing the contributions of the Russian delegation to the Congress on the History of Science held in London in 1931, which Sraffa sent to him in August 1931 (Sraffa 1991, 23). It thus suggests that Gramsci had already framed the question in these terms before reading Bukharin's article in this volume, which starts with this question as its main concern. But Bukharin's piece must have at least had the effect of reinforcing Gramsci's emphasis on this question, which would get its own rubric, 'The objective existence of reality' (and variations thereof) and recurs in later notebooks, including Notebook 11, where it is brought into even sharper relief.

It is vis-à-vis Bukharin's work that Gramsci comes to re-frame the question of the relationship between philosophical realism and natural science. In a note titled 'The Popular Manual. The reality of the external world.' Gramsci wrote: 'The entire polemic about the "reality of the external world," it seems to me, is badly framed and mostly pointless (and I am also referring to the paper presented at the Congress of the History of Science held in London).' (8§215) The note then sketches out three points that will later be developed into a lengthier

note in Notebook 11 (11§17): first, the need to address why people take for granted the reality of the external world; second, the need to understand why there arose philosophies that deny it; third, the need to define the exact place of science in the philosophy of praxis. This last point leaves no uncertainty as to the importance that Gramsci attached to the question: 'The place of the natural or exact sciences within the framework of historical materialism. This is the most interesting and urgent question that needs to be resolved in order to avoid falling into fetishism, which is, precisely, a rebirth of religion in a different guise.' (8§215) The point is taken up in the later draft of this note, which criticizes at length Bukharin's handling of the central question of philosophical realism and his failure to convey the importance of this question to the general public, and continues by remarking that, 'The question is closely connected, and understandably so, to the question of the value of the so-called exact or physical sciences and the position that they have come to assume in the [overarching] framework of the philosophy of praxis, of a near-fetishism, as the sole real and true philosophy or knowledge of the world.' (11§17: QC, 1413)

Before probing the connection mentioned by Gramsci, it is important here to address briefly his views on philosophical realism. These are barely delineated and have to be inferred largely from the presuppositions implicit in discussions of other questions. There is in fact only one location in the thematic notebooks where he explicitly spells out the standpoint of the philosophy of praxis on knowledge and here Gramsci describes it effectively as philosophical realism. Throughout, though, he adheres to his earlier argument that this was a philosophical standpoint and not a result of natural science. Perhaps for this reason too, it is separately addressed in Notebook 10, and by reference to Marx's *Holy Family*, rather than in Notebook 11 and by reference to Bukharin's work, as the main concern of this last discussion continued to be to deny that science could prove realism and show instead what it had to contribute, what its place was in the philosophy of praxis. In this brief note Gramsci wrote: 'In the passage on "French materialism in the Eighteenth Century" (*Holy Family*) the genesis of the philosophy of praxis is rather well and clearly sketched: it is "materialism"

perfected by the work of speculative philosophy and fused with humanism. Truly after these interventions to perfect it, all that is left of the old materialism is philosophical realism.' (10ii§13: QC, 1250)

Another note discussing the Kantian noumenon, also with reference to the *Holy Family*, shows Gramsci vacillating between realism and phenomenalism, which he takes to be supported by Marx. Of the two fundamental components of philosophical realism, he grudgingly endorses ontological realism, while remaining ambiguous about epistemological realism.

> If reality is as we know it and our knowledge changes continuously, if, that is, no philosophy is definitive but it is historically determined, *it is difficult to imagine that reality objectively changes with our own changing and it is difficult to admit it not only for common sense but also for scientific thought*. In the *Holy Family* it is said that reality is entirely encompassed by [*si esaurisce nei*] phenomena and that there is nothing beyond phenomena, and so it is certainly. But the demonstration is not easy. What are phenomena? Are they something objective, that exists in and by itself or are they qualities that man has distinguished in consequence of his practical interests (the construction of his economic life) and of his scientific interests, that is, of the need of finding an order in the world and to describe and classify things (a need that is itself linked to mediated and future practical interests)? Given the statement that what we know in things is nothing other than ourselves, our needs and our interests, which is to say that what we know is [part of the] superstructures (or non-definitive philosophies) it is difficult to avoid thinking about *something real beyond this knowledge*, not in the metaphysical sense of a "noumenon", of an "unknown god", or of an "unknowable", but in the concrete sense of a "relative ignorance" of reality, of something as yet "unknown" *which however it will be possible to know one day when the "physical" and intellectual instruments of men will have been perfected, that is, when the social and technical conditions of humankind will have changed in a progressive sense*. (10ii§40: QC, 1290-1, my emphases)

The Kantian distinction between noumenon, or thing-in-itself, and phenomenon, or thing-for-us, had opened the path to modern phenomenalist philosophies, sometimes describable as variants of idealism, that dismissed attempts to know underlying reality, the noumenon, as simply irrelevant, while focusing exclusively on what could be known about phenomena. The above note, despite its nod to phenomenalism, asserts both the existence of an independent reality, 'something real'—the fundamental statement of ontological realism—and the possibility of getting to know this reality—the fundamental statement of epistemological realism. Significantly, a similar point was added by Gramsci to a note as he transcribed it in Notebook 11, where the new draft includes a rejection of the

notion of ‘any unknowable’ and suggests that this should simply be understood as an ‘empirical lack of knowledge.’ (11§37: QC, 1456-7) However, an important qualification to Gramsci’s rejection of the Kantian noumenon and assertion of realism ought to be noted, because the above passage, as well as several other passages, also imply that human knowledge is always knowledge of the thing-for-us, rather than the thing-in-itself. In this sense, Gramsci is effectively endorsing a phenomenalist stance. Part of the answer perhaps lies in his advocacy of a dynamic view of scientific knowledge as fallible but perfectible, sustained by the possibility of scientific progress and the future development of the intellectual and material instruments of science, which Gramsci hints at towards the end of the passage.

4.3 – The Critique of Bukharin and Common Sense Realism

What was the ‘better understanding of the basic principles of science’ that Gramsci sought to put forward? It was, in a nutshell, a dynamic view of science as fallible but perfectible. Against both common sense and Bukharin’s *Popular Manual*, which he faulted precisely because it failed to criticize common sense, Gramsci asserted a dynamic view that emphasizes the historical development of knowledge. In so doing he was arguably proposing a conception of knowledge that is crucial for the rise of modern theories of science. Aristotelian philosophy defined true knowledge in contrast to opinion by its certainty and incorrigibility, and rejection of the Aristotelian view of true knowledge as unrevisable is central to modern attempts at defining fallibilism in scientific knowledge as a *via media* between infallibilism and skepticism (Niiniluoto 1999, 79). Gramsci indeed was taking such a middle road when he proposed a view of science as fallible but perfectible and indeed his criticism addressed precisely Aristotelian philosophy. Here we should consider first the religious and in particular Aristotelian/Thomist worldview that Gramsci saw at the heart of common sense realism, and then consider the essentially dynamic view of scientific knowledge that he opposed to it.

Bukharin’s *Popular Manual* is discussed In Notebook 11 as a notable, but ultimately failed, effort to introduce the new theory of history to a broader public.

It is criticized by Gramsci precisely because it failed to do so without pandering to common misconceptions, which it in fact shared. The notes on science develop this criticism for the specific question of natural science and its exact role vis-à-vis philosophical realism. For Gramsci, in fact, Bukharin's work failed to criticize common-sense realism and actually ended up sharing its standpoint. The latter was religious in origin and close to Aristotelian/Thomist philosophy in its conception of reality. Gramsci followed with particular interest the development, in the Italy of his day, of a neo-Thomist current that sought to bridge the gulf between Catholic doctrine and science, at the very time when the gulf between the lay Crocean idealist philosophical culture and science was actually widening. This threatened the already culturally isolated lay scientists. It also threatened to consolidate antiquated views of reality and scientific knowledge by linking up analogous views shared by orthodox materialists, common sense and religion (Di Meo 2008, 118-27, 137). Orthodox materialists, in fact, in entertaining common sense realism, were not criticizing religion but participating in it. They were participating, in particular, in the medieval Aristotelian/Thomist worldview. The note on the Kantian noumenon just quoted is followed in Notebook 10 by a lengthy note that clarifies the importance of the critique of common sense and religion. Here Gramsci reviews the latest criticism raised by Croce against Marxism – its vulgarization in the process of diffusion. Certainly, Gramsci acknowledges, some currents of Marxism had deteriorated into a philosophy 'that can be translated into "theological" or transcendental terms, that is [in the terms of] prekantian and precartesian philosophies.' (10ii§41i: QC, 1292) But this was inevitable, Gramsci implies, for a conception of the world that sought to go to the masses and become part of a wide movement of moral and intellectual reform. 'Croce reproaches the philosophy of praxis for its "scientism", its "materialistic" superstition, its presumed return to the "intellectual middle ages".' (QC, 1293) If this was so, it was because in fact the masses were stuck in the 'intellectual middle ages' and were receptive chiefly to 'prekantian and precartesian philosophies'.

That these philosophies included for Gramsci Aristotelian/Thomist philosophy becomes evident from another note. In his critique of Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology* he suggests that the philosophy implicit in this work is 'a positivistic aristotelianism, an adaptation of formal logic to the methods of the physical and natural sciences.' (11§14: QC, 1402-3) Gramsci attributed two aspects of the thought of orthodox materialists like Bukharin to traditional philosophies like the Aristotelian/Thomist one. The first aspect is most clearly from Aristotelian/Thomist philosophy. It involves the search for the ultimate or single cause, which was God for Aristotelian/Thomist philosophy, or the material base of society in Bukharin's case. It thus concerns aetiology. Gramsci brings up this point in one of the earliest notes on philosophy (4§26), which was later copied into Notebook 11. 'One of the most glaring traces of old metaphysics in the *Popular Manual*,' Gramsci remarks, is the search for a single or ultimate cause, which can be shown to be 'one of the manifestations of the "search for god".' (11§31) Because its central concern is to predict the outcome of historical events, its conception of science focuses on the search for laws and regularities in historical development and it is borrowed largely from the natural sciences, which appear to be able to foresee the evolution of natural events. 'Hence the search for the essential causes, or rather for the "first cause," the "cause of causes." But the "Theses on Feuerbach" had already criticized in anticipation this simplistic conception.' (11§15: QC, 1403; 8§197) Gramsci is criticizing here the mechanical regression to ever more basic and fundamental causes, ultimately to be found in nature or matter. The fundamental insight of the *Theses on Feuerbach* regarding the interaction between subject and object in practical activity had already criticized this mechanical regression because it saw historical development as the outcome of a mutual interaction between subject and object, or superstructure and base, which were united in historical development.

The second aspect of the thought of orthodox Materialists that Gramsci attributed to 'traditional philosophies' like the Aristotelian/Thomist one involves their conceptualization of the question of the reality of the external world. It concerns the very foundations of realism in ontology and epistemology. The

passage in which Gramsci reviewed Croce's criticism of vulgarizations of Marxism went on to make an explicit association between religion and the materialism of common sense in so far as the question of the 'objectivity of the external world' is concerned, as well as to suggest how Marxism could overcome this association.

> *The dualistic conception and [the conception] of the "objectivity of the external world" which has been planted among the people by religion and traditional philosophies* that have become "common sense" cannot be uprooted and substituted except by a new conception that appears intimately fused with a political program and a conception of history that the people recognizes as an expression of its life needs. It is impossible to conceive the life and diffusion of a philosophy that is not also a contemporary politics, closely linked to the predominant activity among the popular classes, work, and that therefore does not [also] appear, within limits, as necessarily connected to science. This new conception perhaps will initially take on superstitious and primitive forms like those of mythological religion, but it will find within itself and within the intellectual forces coming forth from the people the elements to overcome this primitive stage. *This conception connects man to nature by means of technology, maintaining the superiority of man and exalting it in creative work, thus exalting the spirit and history*. (10ii§41i: QC, 1295-6, my emphases)

In this passage the conception of the 'objectivity of the external world' has its roots in religion. It can be overcome by Marxism thanks to its emphasis upon practical activity, concretely understood as technology, which connects man to nature, that is, subject to object.

If not Aristotelian/Thomist in origin, the conception of the 'objectivity of the external world' was certainly religious in origin and equally static/dogmatic for Gramsci. This is the crux of Gramsci's critique of Bukharin, who had relied on common sense to criticize subjective conceptions of reality, in what was essentially a regressive operation that ultimately relied on religious views. In fact, Gramsci suggests that although realistic elements prevail in common sense as the raw products of experience, this is not per se in contrast with religion and the large religious component of common sense (11§13: QC, 1397; 8§173). On the contrary, the conception of reality endorsed by common sense is actually of religious origin. 'The public "believes" that the external world is objectively real, but here a question is raised: what is the origin of this "belief" and what critical value does [the adverb] "objectively" have? In fact this belief is of religious origin … because all religions have taught and teach that the world, nature, the universe

have been created by god before the creation of man and that therefore man has found the world already ready-made, catalogued and defined once and for all'. (11§17: QC, 1411-2) Bukharin himself had criticized Berkeley's idealism for its religious origin, but failed to see the religious origin of materialistic, as well as idealistic, conceptions of reality (11§60: QC, 1486). These were essentially static and dogmatic for Gramsci, as evinced by his comment that religious mythology depicted man coming into a world 'already ready-made, catalogued and defined once and for all'.

Gramsci opposed to these views an essentially dynamic view of scientific knowledge as the product of historical development. In this respect – and in this respect alone – he was deliberately incorporating the lessons of subjectivist, that is idealist, conceptions of scientific knowledge. Indeed subjectivism was notable for Gramsci for two reasons. One is its re-evaluation of active human involvement in the process of acquisition of knowledge. This is compatible with the notion that he derived from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, that human practical activity was central to evaluating claims regarding the objectivity of knowledge, not just in the pragmatist sense that the practical use of theoretical knowledge was a measure of its validity, but also and especially in the sense that it is through active human intervention in the world that objective knowledge is generated. Another reason why subjectivism was notable for Gramsci was that through this active intervention knowledge was developed, that is, it was verified and corrected as experience demanded. Thus Gramsci chided Bukharin for having pandered to common sense and failed to introduce the contributions of the subjective conception of reality altogether. By contrast, an introduction to the theory of historical materialism should have critically presented to the public a new and higher synthesis that incorporated the contributions of the subjective conception of reality, chiefly, its emphasis on active human involvement in the production of knowledge in what is essentially an historical process of development. For Gramsci, 'the idealist assertion that the reality of the world is a creation of the human spirit' is closely connected to the assertion by the philosophy of praxis that all ideologies, science included, are historical constructs bound to be superseded.

Gramsci thought it astonishing that this connection had not been emphasized and developed (11§17: QC, 1413). It is essential to the *Prison Notebooks*, however, where the fundamental insight into the historical character of science emerges already in Notebook 4 and is continued in Notebook 11. This is best characterized as the view that science is fallible but perfectible.

The note that reviews definitions of science and suggests that science 'as such' cannot prove the existence of reality, goes on to emphasize the fallibility and fundamentally historical character of science. 'Is all that science asserts "objectively" true? In a definitive manner? If scientific truths were definitive, science would have ceased to exist as such, as research, as new experiments, and scientific activity would have reduced itself to exposing what has already been discovered. Luckily for science, this is not true. But if not even scientific truths are peremptory and definitive, science too is an historical category, it is a continuously developing movement.' (11§37: QC, 1456) One could possibly object to this argument by suggesting that there is a stock of unrevisable truths that keeps growing, but Gramsci seems to have been aware of the possibility of fundamental changes in scientific knowledge whereby known facts were re-interpreted in the light of new ones and within the context of a broader and more comprehensive theory. Discussing the claim he attributes to Bukharin that the new atomic theory destroys Robinsonades, he remarks: 'Is modern atomic theory a "definitive" theory, established once and for all? Who, what scientist, would dare assert such a thing? Or is it not a scientific hypothesis too, that can be left behind [*superata*], that is, absorbed into a broader and more comprehensive theory? The atomic theory and all hypotheses and scientific opinions are superstructures.' (11§30: QC, 1445) There is perhaps a hint of an awareness of the profound revolution that had been taking place in science with the development of atomic theory and quantum mechanics in this note. Most importantly, there is certainly a clear suggestion that he deemed science as perfectible, capable of developing 'broader and more comprehensive' theories.

The notion that science is perfectible is reiterated with a few additions in the note in which Gramsci rejects the notion that science puts us in contact with

‘reality as it is.’ Science too is a superstructure, an ideology, Gramsci states. However he goes on to ask: ‘Can it be said, nevertheless, that science occupies a special place in the study of superstructures because of the fact that its reaction upon the structure has a particular character, of greater extension and continuity in development, especially after the Eighteenth Century, when a special place was made for science in public appreciation?’ (11§38: QC, 1457-8) The rest of the note suggests one mechanism enabling the historical process of development of broader and more comprehensive theories. Science ‘always appears clothed in an ideology and, concretely, science is the union of the objective fact [or observation] with an hypothesis or system of hypotheses that are beyond the mere objective fact.’ Nevertheless, in science, it is possible to separate objective facts from the system of hypotheses so that it is possible to appropriate one—the stock of facts or observations—while rejecting the other—the theory or system of hypotheses (QC, 1458). Gramsci goes on to highlight that for this reason one group can appropriate the science of another group while rejecting its ideology. More precisely, it could appropriate that part of the other group’s scientific knowledge that is closest to a stock of observations—we could suggest Linnaean classification as an example—while rejecting, as per Gramsci’s example, ‘the ideology of vulgar evolutionism.’ The comment is explicitly aimed at those, like Missiroli and Sorel, who, as Gramsci saw it, rejected the appropriation of ‘bourgeois science.’ But for Gramsci science transcends class and cultural divides. Science has, in particular, the potential to be objective in the sense that it is a universal form of knowledge that does not depend upon the specific subject. This potential emerges in Gramsci’s discussion of objectivity vis-à-vis both experimental activity and general cultural differences.

4.4 – Objectivity and Experimental Activity

Experimental activity is absolutely central to natural science and its claims to objectivity for Gramsci. Gramsci praised idealism, the subjective conception of reality, for its emphasis upon active human involvement in the production of knowledge. However, Gramsci fundamentally differed from idealism, particularly Croce’s variety, for his own emphasis upon experimental science. He thus gave a

very practical interpretation of active involvement in the production of knowledge. This was in line with his concrete interpretation of the concept of praxis, as human practical activity involving a close interaction between subject and object, man and nature. Experimental science exemplifies this close interaction for Gramsci. It also exemplifies his understanding of objectivity. The very notion of objectivity depends for Gramsci upon experimental activity and the transcendence of particular or group related viewpoints that it enables. Reproducibility and verifiability of experimental results are key to this conception of objectivity. No reference is made by Gramsci to any other criterion, like (approximately) conforming to the underlying reality, let alone a correspondence theory of truth. It is not clear whether this is an endorsement of phenomenalism, or whether Gramsci thought that transcending individual or group related viewpoints is a pre-condition for accessing the underlying reality, in the sense that, once subjective variability is brought under control, the underlying reality that produces those phenomena can emerge. Certainly, however, Gramsci extended to experimental activity his view of science as fallible but perfectible as he put great stock in the rectification of the material and intellectual instruments of science. The continuous rectification of scientific instruments implies an ability to approximate reality ever more closely, even though reaching it, that is conforming to it exactly, might be a chimera.

Gramsci gives absolutely central importance (unlike Croce) to the development of experimental science both theoretically and historically. Theoretically, he interprets experimental activity as exemplifying praxis. We have seen (Ch. 2), in particular, how experimental activity exemplifies for Gramsci the unity of theory and practice that was central to his concept of praxis. This was in a note referring to the assertion by Engels that '"the materiality of the world is demonstrated by the lengthy and laborious development of philosophy and natural sciences"', where Gramsci suggests that this assertion should be reviewed and studied in greater detail (11§34: QC, 1448). Here he suggests that in this statement regarding 'the development of philosophy and natural sciences', by science should be understood the unity of theory and practice that is found in the

experiemtal method (QC, 1448-9). Historically, he sees the rise of the experimental method as separating two worlds and heralding the demise of theology and metaphysics. In this same note in fact he goes on to suggest that

> Undoubtedly *the success [affermarsi] of the experimental method separates two historical worlds*, two epochs, and begins the process of dissolution of theology and metaphysics, and [the process of development] of modern thought, which is crowned by the philosophy of praxis. Scientific experimentation is the first cell of the new production method, the new form of active union between man and nature. (QC, 1449, my emphasis).

Note that the central place that Gramsci accords to experimental science here does not entail an endorsement of empiricism. It does not entail, in particular, that theoretical concepts emerge from experimental results alone. On the contrary, Gramsci suggests that there is a mutual interaction of theory and practice, or concepts and sense data, in the activity of the experimental scientist whose 'thought is continuously controlled by practice' and, conversely, whose practice is controlled by thought.

In this process, objecivity is achieved as experimental science transcends merely particular or group related viewpoints and realizes its potentially universal character. It is this potentially universal character of experiments that lends science its objectivity. The reproducibility and verifiability of scientific experiments is essential in this context. The importance of reproducibility emerges in Gramsci's discussion of infinitely small phenomena, which had become embroiled in the debate over subjectivism and idealism, ever since quantum mechanics had raised the possibility that the act of observing a phenomenon altered it (Greco 2008). Gramsci does not in fact refer to quantum mechanics, but shares the same epistemological concerns. He focuses on the remark that certain phenomena 'could not be considered independently from the subject that observes them' because of the special skills required to reproduce certain experimental results, skills so special as to be tied to specific individuals and to be inexplicable. This is, effectively, a variant of the implicit knowledge argument. Gramsci starkly rejects it, in the process of reaffirming the view of science as fallible but perfectible, this time in the specific case of verification of

experimental results. ‘Hasn’t the whole of scientific progress until now manifested itself in the fact that *new experiences and observations have corrected and amplified the preceding experiences and observations*? How could this happen if a given experience could not be reproduced, even when the observer has changed, [if] it could [not still] be verified, amplified, giving rise to new and original interconnections?’ (11§36: QC, 1452, my emphasis) Gramsci also starkly rejects the subjectivist implications of the argument, at least in their more outlandish interpretation. ‘If it were true that the infinitesimally small phenomena under consideration cannot be considered to exist independently of the subject that observes them,’ Gramsci remarks, ‘they wouldn’t even be observed [in the first place], but [would be] “created” and would fall in the dominion of the pure intuition or fantasy of the individual. The question could also be raised as to whether we can “twice” create (observe) the same fact. It wouldn’t even be a matter of “solipsism” but of demiurgy or witchcraft.’ But instead, Gramsci goes on to point out, ‘despite all practical difficulties inherent in the diverse sensibility of individuals, the phenomenon repeats itself and can be objectively observed by various scientists, independently of each other’. (QC, 1454)

The reproducibility of scientific experiments is essential to verifiability and Gramsci puts the ability to control or verify scientific experiments at the very heart of science and its claims to objectivity. Indeed Gramsci makes verifiability the central task of experimental science and effectively equates it with objectivity. The key to this argument is that verification transcends individual or group related viewpoints.

> Science selects the sensations, the primordial elements of knowledge: it considers certain sensations as transitory, as apparent, as erroneous [*fallaci*] because they depend upon special individual conditions and certain other [sensations] as enduring, as permanent, as superior to special individual conditions. *Scientific work has two principal aspects: one that incessantly rectifies the ways [il modo] of knowledge, it rectifies and strengthens the organs of sensation, elaborates new and [more] complex principles of induction and deduction, that is, it refines the very instruments of experience and its verification [controllo]; the other [aspect] that applies this instrumental complex (of material and mental instruments) to establishing that which in sensations is arbitrary, individual, transitory*. One establishes that which is common to all men, that which all men can verify [*controllare*] in the same way, independently of each other, so long as the same technical conditions of verification

> have been equally observed. "Objective" means this and this alone: *one affirms that reality to be objective, an objective reality, that is ascertained [or verified] by all men, which is independent of any viewpoint that is merely particular or group [related]* (11§37: QC, 1455-6, my emphases)

This last definition of objectivity emphasizes verifiability understood as trancendence of particular or group related viewpoints. It also ties the view of science as fallible but perfectible reiterated in the previous note – stressing that 'new experiences and observations have corrected and amplified the preceding experiences and observations' – to the rectification and strengthening of both material and intellectual instruments, that is, the 'organs of sensation' and the 'principles of induction and deduction' respectively.

In this 'instrumental complex', Gramsci gives pride of place to intellectual instruments over and above material instruments, as exemplified by the fact that he reserved a section of Notebook 11 for 'The logical instruments of thought'. This is in open contrast to Bukharin. He attributes to Bukharin the view that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the development of material instruments and scientific progress (11§21: QC, 1420). Against this view Gramsci asserts that 'the principal "instruments" of scientific progress are of the intellectual (and also political) kind [*ordine*], [of the] methodological [kind]'. (QC, 1421) He goes on to suggest that the expulsion of the authority of the Bible and Aristotle from the scientific field constituted a milestone in the progress of modern science, presumably as they paved the way for both a renewal of logic and a greater emphasis on empirical observation. The main point here is that these intellectual instruments are not a static reflection of an unchanging mind, but develop historically. Thus Gramsci remarks that 'Engels rightly wrote that the "intellectual instruments" were not born out of nothing, they are not innate in man, but they are acquired, they have developed and they develop historically.' (QC, 1421) Or he notes in passing that 'Formal logic [too] has its development, its history, etc.; it can be taught, enriched, etc.' (11§42: QC, 1461) Indeed both material and intellectual instruments develop historically, as they are both continually rectified, a point that further adds to the view of science as fallible but perfectible:

> ‘What interests science is not so much the objectivity of reality, but *man with his research methods, who continuously rectifies the material instruments that strengthen sensory organs and the logical instruments (including mathematical [sciences]) [that aid] in discriminating and ascertaining*, that is culture, that is the conception of the world, that is the relationship between man and reality with the mediation of technology’ (11§37: QC, 1457, my emphasis)

4.5 –Objectivity and Cultural Differences

Gramsci developed an ‘anthropocentric’ viewpoint, a fundamentally humanist philosophy that focuses first of all on ‘man with his research methods’. Culture plays a central role in this view, as intellectual instruments and even values were a central concern of science. Indeed the very notion of objectivity as endorsed by Gramsci emphasizes both historical development and this subjectivist stance, with its own emphasis upon cultural categories and human values. This does not mean that Gramsci forsook objectivity however. In particular, it does not mean that he had any lesser an esteem for natural science, and experimental science in particular, which he saw as capable of transcending cultural differences and thus as being potentially universal. In fact, if Gramsci saw objectivity as closely tied to human life and culture, he also rejected any form of culturally-based skepticism or relativism, in favor of a world-historical theme emphasizing the advance of objectivity as an historical process of transcendence of cultural divides. There were in fact two ways in which he saw objectivity as transcending cultural differences and thus potentially becoming universal. One way involved it in becoming concretely universal in the sense of diffusing widely to the point of becoming universally accepted. Experimental science, he suggested, was the most ‘concretely universal subjectivity’. Another way involved a pragmatic conception of truth that extends to scientific knowledge writ large the basic approach we have seen he had for the empirical method.

Gramsci saw objectivity itself in historical and anthropocentric terms, rejecting the notion that there could be any such thing outside of human history. ‘Can there be an extra-historical and extra-human objectivity? But who would judge such an objectivity? Who could place themselves from this “viewpoint of the cosmos in itself” and what would such a viewpoint mean? It could very well be argued that it is a residue of the concept of god, precisely in its mystical form

of an unknown god.' (11§17: QC, 1415) This point is reiterated in two other notes. For Gramsci, objectivity is essentially a human value. It exists only in relation to humankind and its quest for knowledge. Commenting on a remark by Russell to the effect that without the existence of humankind we could still think of two points on the surface of the earth, one north of the other, Gramsci objects that in this case 'we could not think about "thinking," we could not think in general about any fact or relation that exist only in so far as humankind exists.' (11§20: QC, 1419) A similar point is made in another note, where Gramsci emphasizes that 'the whole of science is tied to the needs, the life, the activity of man. Without the activity of man, which creates all values, including scientific ones, what would "objectivity" be? Chaos, [or rather] nothing, emptiness, if one can even call it that, because really, if one imagines that man does not exist, one cannot imagine language and thought.' (11§37: QC, 1457). Objectivity is thus inextricably bound to human history, needs and life.

However this does not mean that Gramsci forsook the notion of objectivity, nor that he endorsed any form of cultural relativism. Gramsci cautiously but unequivocally endorsed a position by Engels on this matter: 'Engels's formulation that "the unity of the world consists in its materiality demonstrated … by the lengthy and laborious development of philosophy and natural sciences" contains precisely the seed of the right conception, because it makes recourse to history and man to demonstrate objective reality.' (11§17: QC, 1415) Just as with his approach to the experimetal method, history and the activity of man were the sources of objective knowledge. Thus objectivity is not excluded by an emphasis upon subjectivity and an anthropocentric conception. Having quoted Engels' dictum, Gramsci goes on to suggest that 'Objective always means "humanly objective" which can exactly correspond to "historically subjective", that is, objective would mean "universally subjective".' (Q11§17: 1415-6) This is remarkably close to the definition of 'objective' as the 'universal intersubjective' offered by the logical empiricists of the Vienna Circle and that informed the work of other phenomenalists who preceded them, from Mach, to the empiriocritical current criticized by Lenin. In Gramsci, however, it takes on an historicist and

sociological connotation that does not exclude the possibility of knowing reality in a pragmatic sense. There are in fact two different ways in which the notion of objectivity as the 'universal intersubjective' is understood by Gramsci.

The first way involves the universal adoption of the material and especially intellectual instruments of experimental science, which, as we have seen, enable in themselves the transcending of viewpoints that are merely 'particular or group related'. No doubt, Gramsci thought that 'intellectual instruments' such as formal logic played a key role in experimental science. It seems moreover that his conception of knowledge did not reject the idealist insight that the human mind or spirit made use of intellectual categories to order experience. However, it is important to recall here that Gramsci was opposed both to empiricism and to ahistorical neokantian, as well as Crocean idealism. A key passage is inserted at the end of the note criticizing Bukharin's lack of understanding of metaphysics. 'If "speculative idealism" is the science of the categories and the a priori synthesis of the spirit, that is an anti-historicist form of abstraction, the philosophy implicit in the *Popular Manual* is an idealism [turned] upside down, in the sense that empirical concepts and classifications replace the speculative categories, [while being] as abstract and anti-historical as these.' (11§14: QC, 1403) Gramsci clearly rejects the idealist notion of abstract and timeless categories of the human spirit or mind whereby we apprehend reality, as well as empiricism. Hence, he elaborates the above definition of 'objective' as 'universally subjective' by emphasizing a social-historical process of cultural unification.

> *Man knows objectively in that knowledge is real for the whole of humankind historically unified in a unitary cultural system*; but this process of historical unification occurs with the disappearance of the internal contradictions which tear human society apart, contradictions which are the condition for the formation of [social] groups and the birth of non-universal ideologies, concrete but immediately rendered deciduous by the practical origin of their substance. There is therefore a struggle for objectivity (to free oneself from partial and erroneous ideologies) and this struggle is the same struggle for the cultural unification of humankind. *That which the idealists call "spirit" is not a starting point, but a point of arrival*, the ensemble of superstructures in development towards the concrete and universally objective unification and not a presupposed unity.

> *Experimental science has been (has offered) until now the terrain on which such a cultural unity has reached the maximum extension*: it is the element of knowledge that has contributed the most to unifying the "spirit," to making it become more universal; [experimental science] is the most objective [*oggettivata*] and concretely universalized subjectivity. (11§17: QC, 1416, my emphases)

Thus the intellectual instruments of experimental science, such as formal logic, as well as its fundamental values, have witnessed the broadest process of diffusion, resulting in the 'cultural unity' of 'maximum extension'.

However, this concrete process of universalization does not mean that Gramsci endorses a from of cultural relativism. It is not that scientific truths are culturally relative and only happen to become universal because of the adoption or imposition of certain cultural constructs and values throughout humankind. Rather, there is an underlying relationship that is revealed by the use and usefulness, in concrete practical activity, of certain scientific truths. There is in fact a second way in which objectivity as the 'universal intersubjective' is understood by Gramsci. It involves a transcending of cultural differences by the practical use and results of scientific knowledge in a manner that recalls pragmatic conceptions of knowledge. Such is the case with the concepts of East and West, Orient and Occident. Gramsci makes the point in the same note where he discusses Russell's remark. 'The concepts of "Orient" and "Occident" do not cease to be "objectively real" even though under analytical scrutiny they reveal themselves to be nothing but a conventional "construction", that is, an "historical-cultural" [construction]' (11§20: QC, 1419). The conventional aspect of this 'historical-cultural' construction stands out all the more starkly when we consider that the concepts acquired their meaning 'not from the viewpoint of a melancholy generic man but from the viewpoint of the educated European classes' and they were accepted everywhere through the latter's hegemony. Orient and Occident ended up denoting whole civilizations and Italians, Gramsci observed, could speak of Morocco as an 'oriental' country to refer to its Muslim and Arab culture. (QC, 1419-20) '*And yet these references are real, they correspond to real facts*, they allow one to travel by land and by sea and to arrive precisely where one wanted to arrive, [they allow one] to "predict" the future, to make reality objective [*oggettivare*], to understand the objectivity of the external world.' (QC, 1420, my

emphasis) Note the pragmatic bent of this last passage. Here Gramsci asserts the 'objective reality' of the constructs East and West by reference to their practical results, enabling one, despite their cultural/civilizational connotation, to travel and arrive exactly where one wanted to arrive. In this respect Gramsci shares a fundamentally pragmatic interpretation of truth with later work by Russell, who similarly sought to move beyond the opposition between materialism and idealism, and who also interpreted Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* as the expression of a pragmatic philosophical stance comparable to Dewey's (Cospito 2008a, 76, 79).

Conclusion

Gramsci's notes on science in Notebook 11 were aimed at elucidating the 'basic principles of science' and were thus distinct from a purely cultural critique of misconceptions about science. They were rather the necessary preliminary groundwork for constructing a theory of natural science. Their goal, in keeping with the basic argument about the theoretical autonomy of Marxism, was to emphasize that science did not replace philosophy. Rather, philosophy and, in Gramsci's case, the philosophy of praxis more specifically, informed the theory of science. Science could not replace philosophy because science did not provide access to reality as it really is and it did not thus answer the basic question of philosophical realism. Science too was fallible, but Gramsci, in keeping with the philosophy of praxis, added to this observation a fundamentally dynamic view of science as caught up in historical development, with active human involvement in this development. More precisely, the 'basic principles of science' that Gramsci sought to elucidate was the view that science was fallible but perfectible. One aspect of the historical development of science was that science provided ever more comprehensive theories capable of explaining more and more of the observed phenomena. Another aspect of the historical development of science, concerning particularly experimental science and the observation of phenomena, was that the material and intellectual instruments used in experiments were continuously rectified. These instruments, together with the very procedures of experimental science, enabled the transcending of particular or group-related

viewpoints, thus transcending the characteristics of the specific subject carrying out the experiment, including his/her culture. A third aspect of the development of science was the actual diffusion of the material and intellectual instruments of science. This led to the universalization of science as it transcended cultural differences both in the concrete sense of becoming actually universally adopted and in the pragmatic sense that, regardless of cultural connotations, science provided universally useful results.

5 – ECONOMICS

Gramsci's approach to economics parallels his approach to natural science. In the case of economics too a reflection soon developed that was geared towards understanding the basic principles of the discipline, differentiating it from a cultural critique of certain misconceptions of economics. And in the case of economics too the first goal was to differentiate the discipline from other disciplines with which it was sometimes conflated, that is, from natural science. This was in keeping with Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis that was distinct from both materialism and idealism. Gramsci in fact attacked the fundamental misconception that he attributed to orthodox Marxists such as Bukharin and vulgarizers such as Loria, whose materialism implied that they conflated economics with natural science and physical science in particular. He also rejected Croce's alternative approach, whose idealism led him to define economic behavior as a category of the (human) Spirit. And he defended Marxian economics against Croce's strictures that it was not a science at all. To be precise, Gramsci envisaged two different types of studies of economics. One study consisted in the historical study of the economic structure. This was scientific in the sense in which the natural sciences were deemed by Gramsci to be scientific, that is, it was quantifiable and verifiable. It was not, however, subject to laws. The other study envisaged by Gramsci was a science of economics that was partly empirical-inductive and partly axiomatic-deductive. Gramsci thus sought to incorporate key insights of contemporary debates on the method of economics and at least part of the approach of neoclassical economics as endorsed by Croce. This study was scientific in the more conventional sense in which economics is deemed to be scientific, that is, it derived economic laws from first principles. One of these first principles was the notion of *homo oeconomicus*, which Gramsci deemed indispensable to economic science. Here we find Gramsci cautiously endorsing methodological individualism, as he embraced the notion that there is a category of social phenomena that are eminently reducible to their individual

foundations and that the study of this category of social phenomena is the preserve of economic science (as opposed to economic history, as we will see below, as well as to political science, as we will see in the next chapter).

The argument of this chapter is relevant to three points as outlined in the introduction to the thesis. First, it is relevant to current philological interpretations of Gramsci, as it expands upon the role of economics within Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, a topic that has been addressed in recent philological interpretations. In particular, it expands upon Gramsci's sustained engagement with Croce's early youthful critique of Marxism contained in the collection of essays on *Historical Materialism and Marxian Economics* and links it to his reconstruction of Marxism. The observation that, apart from the reflection on the philosophical concept of immanence, his keen interest in Croce's youthful critique of Marxism is 'inexplicable'(Frosini 2003, 145), does not do justice to the depth of Gramsci's engagement with this work and the questions of economics that it raised. Certainly, Gramsci's interest in Croce's youthful critique of Marx was aimed at refuting elements of it (Thomas 2009, 349) and this was no small matter because Croce's essays marked the beginnings of a dismissive attitude towards Marxism as a comprehensive philosophy or theory of history that had considerable fortune in Italy. Moreover, and most importantly, Gramsci took Croce's critique of Marxian economics as the starting point for his own effort at redefining economics and its role within the philosophy of praxis. This was a foundational effort aimed at economics in its own right, albeit as a subordinate discipline within the overarching framework of the philosophy of praxis. Therefore Croce's critique of Marxian economics for being unscientific assumed an especial importance for Gramsci.

The second point to which the argument of this chapter contributes is the relationship between Gramsci and his contemporaries. These involved Croce's work most of all, but also near-contemporary efforts, such as Weber's, in what came to be known as the *methodenstreit*. This clash over the methods of economics had pitted the new 'German historical school' that had formed around Gustav von Schmoller against the 'Austrian school' around Carl Menger. The

latter was one of the three schools of economics associated with the rising 'neoclassical orthodoxy' or the 'marginalist revolution' that started in the 1870s. Personality differences and the dynamics of baronial power in the university probably exaggerated the contrast between the empirical-inductive historical approach advocated by the first and the axiomatic-deductive abstract approach advocated by the second. In fact, the new 'German historical school' was not so much against the axiomatic-deductive approach *per se*, as against the insufficient foundations upon which it rested, which it sought to provide by thorough empirical investigation. Menger, for his part, was closest to the historical approach among the protagonists of the 'marginalist revolution' and Weber was partly influenced by the 'Austrian school' (Roncaglia 2005, 297-308) despite his interest in historical sociology. But the distorting effects of the adversarial debate lingered on. The contrast, moreover, was actually much more pronounced when historical approaches were set against the other schools associated with the 'marginalist revolution,' whether the 'British' one started by William Stanley Jevons who, together with Alfred Marshall, influenced Maffeo Pantaleoni in Italy, or the 'French/Lausanne school' of Léon Walras and Pareto. It was against these views of economics, as endorsed by Croce, that Gramsci strove to provide a synthesis between the historical and the deductive approaches, that is, between the empirical inductive and axiomatic-deductive methods. This is a synthesis that bears some resemblance to Weber's, but in fact went further in its efforts to lay the foundations for an abstract science of economics.

The centrality of Croce to Gramsci's discussion of economics is needed first of all to dispel some misapprehensions as to the origins of Gramsci's interest in the concept of *homo oeconomicus*. This was not simply a throwback to the classical liberal tradition from Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill. In particular, it was not linked to the Smithian view that man has a 'natural propensity to barter and exchange', nor did it signal a shift in interest from productive to 'phenomenal exchange relations'. From such premises his theory would indeed appear as an 'awkward syncretism of liberalism and marxism' (Hunt 1985, 11-2). But the main referent of Gramsci's discussion of *homo oeconomicus* was Crocean liberalism

and Croce's discussion of the place of economic activity and the accompanying science in a general theory of history, as well as the revived interest in the concept stemming from the 'marginalist revolution', which Pareto and to some extent Pantaleoni represented in Italy. The centrality of Croce to Gramsci's discussion of economics is also needed to dispel arguments concerning the importance of the philosopher Ugo Spirito, a follower of Gentile's actualism and advocate of fascist corporatism, on Gramsci's conception of *homo oeconomicus* and indeed of economics altogether. Arguably, the debate fuelled by Spirito was an echo of the more famous German debate on method and a reference point for Gramsci (Maccabelli 1998, 76). It has also been suggested that the notes on economics focus mostly on the conception of the state and economics of fascist ideologists, including Spirito (Kanoussi 2010, 50). But in fact Croce's youthful essays on Marxism and Marxian economics were a far more important reference for Gramsci as well as a more direct link to the *methodenstreit*.

Gramsci's views on economics also demand an evaluation of his relationship with Sraffa. This too, as much as their relationship over epistemological views related to natural science, is chiefly a matter of conjecture. We can speculate that there was a frequent exchange between the Cambridge economist and Gramsci before the latter's imprisonment and that this included views on economics, particularly the second book of *Capital* (Gilibert 2001). What we do know for sure is that there was an epistolary exchange on Ricardo, on whose *Collected Works* Sraffa was working while in Cambridge. Gramsci was particularly interested in the fact that Ricardo might have contributed to an 'immanentist' conception of economic law and of history in general. This was essential to the philosophy of praxis, so much so, that Gramsci suggested the formula 'the philosophy of praxis = Hegel + David Ricardo'. Sraffa, focusing on the actual origins of Marxism, disagreed (Thomas 2009, 349-59). Other known instances of disagreement on matters of economics between Sraffa and Gramsci include some points of economics which emerged during the first process of publication of the *Prison Notebooks* (Badaloni 1992, 44, 49). Broader differences yet can be imputed regarding their vision of economics and history (Lunghini

1994; Badaloni 1994, 36-7), but such a discussion is moot until we have a firm understanding of what Gramsci's views of economics were. Here one thing stands out about Gramsci's views on Ricardo and how they differed from Sraffa's. Gramsci came to see in Ricardo a crucial figure *for his own reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis*, rather than as a figure relevant to the actual origins of Marxism, as understood by Sraffa. And Gramsci's understanding of Ricardo, particularly what he called Ricardo's method of 'supposing that', was part of a new way of conceiving the science of economics. It is this novel conception of economics as a science that was partly empirical-inductive and partly axiomatic-deductive, but always different from natural science, that ought to be the basis for any comparison between Gramsci and Sraffa.

Gramsci's conception of economics as a science included the view that *homo oeconomicus* was a fundamental concept for it. Only, Gramsci conceived of it as an historical creation, rather than a natural or biological construct. The argument here is therefore also relevant to a third point addressed by the thesis, concerning contemporary social theory that seeks to employ methodological individualism, whether in reconstructing Marxism or simply in sociology more generally. Two points make Gramsci's stance on the use of the concept of *homo oeconomicus* particularly interesting from the standpoint of contemporary theory wishing to employ methodological individualism. The first and more general point stems from Gramsci's approach to defining economic science. Apart from an historical study of the economic structure of society that was closer to political economy, Gramsci also conceived of a scientific study of economic phenomena in which the concept of *homo oeconomicus* and methodological individualism in general was eminently applicable. What is interesting about Gramsci's approach is that it divides social phenomena into those that are amenable to treatment by methods that aggregate across entire social forces, such as political economy, and those that are amenable more to treatment by methodological individualism and in fact require it, such as economics traditionally understood. Gramsci's effort to make room for an economic science within Marxism shows that he thought some phenomena, though not all, needed to be studied through the approach of

methodological individualism. In this, his approach departs from all other approaches to methodological individualism, which tend to argue that all social phenomena need to be approached through it, or none at all, with the partial exception of Weber and the Austrian school as well as James Coleman (Udehn 2001, 95, 305-6).

The second and more specific point made by Gramsci regarding methodological individualism concerns the relationship between strong and weak variants of methodological individualism. Rather than seeing them as alternatives, he conceived of one as a special case of the other, a case in which methodological considerations warranted the use of the strong variant. Weak methodological individualism admits that institutional considerations outwardly influence the behavior of individuals (Udehn 2001, 347-8). Gramsci suggested that indeed there were outward institutional constraints affecting individuals' behavior, as in his use of the concept of 'determinate market' or a specific market determined by the balance of social forces and the institutions supporting them. But, methodologically, he supported the view that at least in some circumstances these institutional set ups could be taken for granted and economic laws built as if they sprang exclusively from a certain notion of *homo oeconomicus*. This was internally determined by socio-cultural forces, such that some preferences and behaviors were culturally influenced. But for any given historical period and place they appeared as if they were natural and could be methodologically treated as such. In this respect, Gramsci came close to the strong methodological individualism of the Austrian school, which admitted of socio-cultural influences (Udehn 2001, 124-5, 348).

Five aspects of Gramsci's reflections on economics are considered in this chapter. (1) The place of economics in the Notebooks is chiefly within the critique of Croce, but this does not mean that Gramsci only had a derivative interest in economics, mainly dictated by the philosophical implications of certain economic concepts. On the contrary, he came to be interested in fundamental methodological questions regarding the definition of economics and its place within the philosophy of praxis. Two questions were central both to his approach

and to the *methodenstreit*. (2) One of these questions concerned the demarcation between natural science and economics, which he upheld against both vulgarizations of Marxian economics and against some 'neoclassical' views. (3) Another question concerned the status of economics as an abstract axiomatic-deductive science, upheld by Croce against Marxian approaches. Gramsci's attempted synthesis between the (artificially) contrasting approaches that distinguished the *methodenstreit* and analogous debates in Italy can best be characterized as an argument for a deductive science of economics that is also historicist. This, he tried to show, had always been contained in Ricardo's approach to economics. To be precise, however, it is necessary to distinguish between two distinct types of economic studies envisaged by Gramsci. (4) One is an historical study of the economic structure that is akin to political economy. This study denies that the structure itself is subject to general laws of historical development. It emphasizes, instead, that its development gives rise to the socio-economic and politico-institutional framework within which economic activity takes place. Gramsci did not stop however at this historical and institutionalist study of economics. (5) In fact, his interest in social forces and institutions in the context of economic studies stemmed precisely from the fact that they might constitute the preconditions for certain social phenomena to behave with a law-like regularity. The other type of study envisaged by Gramsci is an abstract, social-scientific study that treats these historically specific preconditions as premises from which to deduce laws describing this regularity. The existence of a 'determinate market' and of a specific *homo oeconomicus* constituted these preconditions for an economic science that was indeed amenable to treatment by methodological individualism.

5.1 – The Development of the Notes on Economics

There is no indication that Gramsci wanted to undertake to write an essay on economics (Francioni 1987, 26). Indeed Gramsci was not an economist, nor was he attempting to be one. Gramsci's reflection on economics was essentially methodological. It was concerned with the possibility of a science of economics, its foundations and its place in the philosophy of praxis, not with contributing

substantive theories to economics. It is the definition and status of the economic that concerned Gramsci. In this case too, as with the study of natural science, Gramsci arrived relatively early to feel the need to define the basic principles of the discipline and establishing what role it would have within his reconstruction of Marxism. Much of Gramsci's reflection on economics is concentrated in Notebook 10, where we find eighteen notes titled 'points of reflection for the study of economics' alongside the notes on Croce and those on the introduction to the study of philosophy (Kanoussi 2010, 48). There is a separate analysis of certain economic phenomena that Gramsci undertook in notes under the rubric of 'Americanism and Fordism,' which he would later group in Notebook 22 by the same title. But, with the exception of a couple of important notes in Notebook 11 and a few in later miscellaneous notebooks, by far most of the notes concerned with the definition of economics as a science and the associated methodological questions are concentrated in the notebook devoted to the analysis and criticism of Croce's philosophy. This location is important. Whether we consider Notebook 10 to be a fourth 'Series' on philosophy, or whether we consider it part of a generic 'return to Labriola', it is related to Gramsci's project for a reconstruction of Marxism. This testifies to the centrality of economics to Gramsci's thought. And if a serious reflection on economics seems to suddenly appear only in Notebook 10 (Frosini 2003, 143), there are however clues to a long-standing and continuous interest. Indeed Gramsci considered the study of economics as a priority from the moment of his incarceration (Thomas 2009, 347-8).

Two strands of Gramsci's work foreshadow his later interest in economics as evinced by the notes in Notebook 10. The first strand is his criticism of Croce. Gramsci addresses foundational questions of economics mostly in single-draft notes that appear only in Notebook 10. But perhaps this suggests precisely a purposefulness and clarity of vision regarding the place of economics alongside philosophy in the reconstruction of Marxism that arose from long reflection. Certainly, the main source of this reflection and critique in Notebook 10, Croce's *Historical Materialism and Marxian Economics*, appears from the very beginning in the *Prison Notebooks*, where it is cited with precise references backed by

quotes and page numbers (1§10; 1§29), suggesting both that Gramsci had the volume at hand for a long time and also that he was very familiar with it. Although not all these references address questions of economics, a few early notes on Marxian economics are based upon it, in the first two series of 'Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism' in Notebooks 4 (4§15; 4§18; 4§19; 4§36) and 7 (7§13; 7§23) respectively. These notes, together with the more sustained work in Notebook 10, show that Gramsci's reflection on economics was also an integral part of his effort at reconstructing Marxism.

One role that Croce's essays on materialism and economics played was in relation to the critique of Loria and Lorianism and, more in general, of vulgarizations of Marxian economics. Indeed Gramsci's criticism of Loria's vulgarization is largely derived from this work by Croce, which includes an essay specifically on Loria. The earliest references do not engage the work substantially, but show that Gramsci was very well acquainted with it. A very early note 'on originality in science' compares a passage on this issue by Luigi Einaudi from an article in the *Riforma Sociale* to a very similar passage from Croce's work (1§11). The note on Graziadei's Land of Cockaigne develops an observation made by Croce in a lengthy footnote in this work (1§63). We later find more substantial points too. For example, the criticism of Loria's vulgarization of Marxian economics for having reduced material forces of production to technical instruments alone, is explicitly derived from this work by Croce. The note, titled 'The technical instrument in the *Popular Manual*,' makes no other reference to Bukharin than in its title, and discusses instead Loria as the author who had arbitrarily substituted the expression 'technical instrument[s]' for the Marxian expression 'material forces of production.' (4§19) It is taken up and developed in Notebook 11 (11§29). Elsewhere Gramsci extends Croce's criticism of Loria to Einaudi (7§13).

The second strand of Gramsci's work that testifies to an interest in economics concerns Lorianism, some exponents of which, notably Loria himself and Graziadei, were in fact economists. Einaudi deserves a place apart from Lorianism, but he was somewhat ungenerously consigned by Gramsci to its ranks

for his efforts in drawing a complete bibliography of Loria's work. A deeper link between Einaudi and Loria existed through the 'Turin School' of economics, of which Gramsci might have been aware. But even so Einaudi's work was undoubtedly more subtle and sophisticated and Gramsci must have certainly been aware of this. When Gramsci asked Sraffa for readings on economics, the latter sent him Marshall's *Principles of economics* (in Italian translation) as well as the *Course on the science of finance* by Einaudi, who had been Sraffa's supervisor at Turin University. Gramsci seemed more interested in Marshall's work than in Einaudi's, although in fact he did not take notes on either one (Gilibert 2001, 160). However, Gramsci was well familiar with the *Riforma Sociale*, the journal of the 'Turin School' that Einaudi edited, and a number of notes on economics in Notebook 10 address Einaudi's contributions to this journal. It is also through Einaudi's contributions to this and other journals that Gramsci addresses Spirito's intervention on economics, as the 'Einaudi-Spirito,' the 'Einaudi-Benini-Spirito' and 'Einaudi-Benini' polemics (4§42; 6§10; 10ii§32), rather than as a critique of Spirito in his own right. The rubric 'Spirito & co' that appears at least once in the early miscellaneous notebooks is not taken up again.

Just as in the case of Gramsci's reflection on natural science, dissatisfaction with Lorianism quickly matured into a desire for a better understanding of the basic principles of the science in question, economics in this case. The first note on Loria, jotted down from memory, is already dismissive. It recalls among his works the *Course on Political Economy* as well as more outlandish pieces such as one on the social influence of airplanes (1§25). There are also notes on Graziadei that, although not copied to later notebooks, testify both to Gramsci's continued interest in economics and to a desire to grapple with more basic, foundational questions. Graziadei's absurd notion that machinery produced profits in and by itself only highlights for Gramsci the need to start again 'from the fundamental principles of economics, from the logic of this science' (7§23: PN, 173). Another note sketching these principles seems to anticipate key points of his later sustained reflection.

> In order to refute Graziadei, *one has to go back to the basic concepts of economics*. (1) It must be acknowledged that economic science starts from the hypothesis of a particular market (whether it be a purely competitive market or a monopolistic market), except that one must determine what variations might be introduced into this constant by this or that element of reality, which is never "pure." (2) What one studies is the real production of new wealth (7§30: PN, 179-80, my emphasis).

What Gramsci did in later notes was precisely 'to go back to the basic concepts of economics', so that his criticism of Croce and of Lorianism developed into a foundational interest in the role of economics within a reconstructed Marxism. The first step (logically) of this reconstruction was to assert the autonomy of economics vis-à-vis natural science.

5.2 – Natural Science and Economics

Gramsci shared with Croce the aim of asserting the autonomy of economics from natural science and technology, a question that had also been central to the *methodenstreit*. Indeed a crucial bone of contention in earlier debates on method had been whether there were fundamental differences between the natural and 'cultural sciences.' The question had certainly been central for Heinrich Rickert and Weber, as well as Dilthey (Oakes 1988, 21-8, 64-72). These arguments were given new meaning by the 'marginalist revolution' and the rise of 'neoclassical economics'. The latter aspired to found an economics modeled on natural science, an economics whose laws had the same 'absolute and objective characteristics of natural laws.' It stripped production of all social relations and it stripped the individual of all social connotations (Screpanti and Zamagni 2005, 166-7). Gramsci's discussion actually addresses the problem of demarcation between natural sciences and economics in relation to two quite different arguments, respectively concerning demarcation from physical sciences and from biology. There were in fact two types of reductions of economics to natural science, one reducing it to physical science, the other reducing it to biological science. The first argument, involving the reduction of parts of economics to physical sciences, concerns matter as in Loria's description of the 'technical instrument' as a driving force of history, as well as Bukharin's own views on matter. The second argument, involving the reduction of parts of economics to biological sciences, concerns 'neoclassical' economics and its views of *homo oeconomicus*. Although

physics was most often invoked as a model for economics, most notably by Pareto, Gramsci focused on the biological reductionism in views of the individual by Pantaleoni. In both arguments Gramsci focused also on methodological questions, while not ignoring substantive issues.

The reduction of economics to a physical science is indeed criticized by Gramsci both methodologically and substantively. It is Bukharin's very concept of science that ought to be criticized, for Gramsci, as it is based on natural science alone. In particular, Gramsci dismisses efforts at applying elsewhere the methodology of the natural sciences simply because it had yielded such fruitful results in this field. He points out, on the contrary, that 'every [field of] research has its determinate method and constructs its own determinate science,' and that 'the method has developed and has been elaborated together with the development and elaboration of that determinate science and forms a coherent whole with it.' (11§15: QC, 1404) Gramsci especially criticizes Bukharin's restricted, implicit, understanding of sociology as a natural science and in the process casts doubts on the very conception of science as a search for laws. Sociology in the narrow sense in which it is used in the *Popular Manual* is for Gramsci, 'an effort to "experimentally" derive the laws of evolution of human society in such a manner as to be able to "foresee" the future with the same certainty with which one foresees that from an acorn an oak tree will develop.' (11§26: QC, 1432) Moreover, Gramsci goes on to cast doubts on the very notion that such empirically derived sociological laws can amount to explanations. 'The so-called sociological laws, which are assumed as causes – such a fact occurs because of such a law etc. – have no causal import whatsoever; they are almost invariably tautologies or paralogisms.' Gramsci seems to be criticizing here the interpretation of 'relations of similarity', arguably correlations, as causal explanations. (QC, 1433)

Attempts to provide causal explanations of socio-economic developments on material bases as proposed by Marx, Gramsci goes on to argue, should in no way involve a reduction of the economy to matter as understood by physical science and technology. This transpires in his critique of Lorianism. Einaudi,

though apparently familiar with Croce's *Historical Materialism and Marxian Economics*, ignores its indictment of Loria and thus accepts Loria's fundamental misinterpretation of Marx's theory. In particular, he 'confuses the development of technical instruments with the development of economic forces; for him, speaking about the development of productive forces means only to speak about the development of technical instruments.' Moreover, specifically extending the argument that the concept of matter in historical materialism is concerned with matter as socially organized and not as studied by physical sciences, Gramsci criticizes Einaudi for thinking that 'the forces of production for critical economics consist only of material things and not also of social, that is human, relations and forces, which are incorporated in material things and of which the right to property is the juridical expression.' (10ii§39: QC, 1290) The earlier note on 'technical instruments' (4§19) is considerably expanded and reworked into Notebook 11 (11§29: QC, 1439-40), with the intent of clarifying the difference between Marx's concept of economic forces and Loria's vulgarization. The new note starts by citing Croce and then includes a lengthy passage, taken from Croce's work, comparing two renditions of Marx's 1859 *Preface*: the first by Labriola, from the essay *In memory of the Communist Manifesto*; the second by Loria, from *The earth and the social system*. The comparison shows Loria's substitution quite strikingly. Gramsci adds that Croce had rightly pointed out, moreover, that both in *Capital* and elsewhere, 'the importance of technical inventions is emphasized and a history of technology is invoked, but there is no writing [by Marx] in which the "technical instrument" is made into the ultimate and supreme *cause* of economic development.' (QC, 1440, original emphasis)

This note is followed by a note on 'matter' that addresses epistemological concerns and is often cited as such, but does so very much with an eye to the reduction of economic explanations to natural-scientific and technological bases alone. Bukharin too is in fact criticized for having misunderstood Marx's emphasis upon the material or economic base of society to involve a reduction of socio-economic phenomena, literally, to their material constitution. But this is a fundamental misinterpretation.

> In reality the philosophy of praxis does not study a machine to get to know and establish the atomic structure of its material, the phisico-chemico-mechanical properties of its natural components ([which are the] object of study by the exact sciences and technology), but [it studies a machine] as a moment of the material forces of production, in that it is the object of ownership by determinate social forces, in that it expresses a social relation and this [social relation] corresponds to a determinate historical period. (11§30: QC, 1443)

Highlighting the importance of the 'ensemble of the material forces of production' in history and their centrality to historiography, Gramsci immediately stresses however that 'the concept of activity by these forces cannot be confused and not even compared with that of activity in the physical or metaphysical sense.' He then gives the example of electricity, which is considered by historical materialism only as 'an element of production dominated by man and incorporated in the material forces of production, [as an] object of private property.' (QC, 1443)

The absurdity of attempting to explain socio-economic phenomena by physical science is exposed by Gramsci in his discussion of Bukharin's claim that 'the new atomic theory destroys individualism (robinsonades).' (QC, 1444) If this claim referred to the scientific theory itself, it would be nothing but a baroque form of idealism suggesting that men obey scientific theories. If, on the other hand, the claim referred to the underlying reality, it would lead to the absurd conclusion that the same underlying reality has not been operative throughout history. Gramsci asks polemically: 'why the "atomistic" reality was not always operative, then, if it was and is a natural law, but to become operative it had to wait until a theory of it had been constructed by men? Do men only obey the laws that they know, then, as if they were laws emanated by Parliament?' (QC, 1444) Historical change further underlines the absurdity of the claim, since momentous socio-economic changes have actually run counter to this law of nature and society. 'Or should one presume that the passage from the medieval corporate regime to economic individualism has been antiscientific, a mistake of history and nature?' (QC, 1445) Gramsci also adds in this context an important if brief parenthetical comment on a purely methodological concern: 'apart from the fact that robinsonades can sometimes be practical schemas constructed to indicate a

tendency or [to give] a proof by contradiction: even the author of *Critical Economics*[, Marx,] has had recourse to robinsonades.' (QC, 1445) Gramsci thus did endorse the use of methodological individualism in economics.

What Gramsci rejected were arguments that grounded methodological individualism in biological interpretations of *homo oeconomicus*. This is the second type of reduction of economics that Gramsci criticized and it led him to take a stance on questions central to the *methodenstreit* such as its very understanding of *homo oeconomicus*. In this case we find that Gramsci opposes the reduction of *homo oeconomicus* to biological bases that is implicit in the understanding of the individual merely as an individual of a biological species or, in the even more explicitly reductionist formulation endorsed by sensism, as a biological machine interacting with its surroundings. Both methodological individualism and sensism were central to the 'marginalist revolution', in fact. Methodological individualism was not new to economic thought, of course, as underlined by the above references to Marx and his dismissal of the economic individualism of Smith and Mill as robinsonades. But it was brought to the fore by the 'marginalist revolution,' in the wake of which economics became explicitly and definitely individualistic. It was also not necessarily opposed to social and historical approaches, particularly in the formulation given to it by Menger, which influenced Weber (Udehn 2001, 97). But in this the 'Austrian school' was atypical. Jevons's views on human psychology, for example, were based on Condorcet's sensism and constituted an impoverishment even compared to Smithian views that at least acknowledged the socializing proclivities of individuals (Roncaglia 2005, 287-92).

Gramsci's stance on this reductionist argument emerges in his criticism of the sensism underpinning Pantaleoni's formulation of *homo oeconomicus* (10ii§30), who had been the first to use this expression. Gramsci's criticism focused on Pantaleoni's *Principles of pure economics*. Here we find the only explicit reference in Notebook 10 to Spirito's views in and of their own, as a brief first comment on this text. 'Rereading the book by Pantaleoni one better understands the reasons for the plentiful writings by Ugo Spirito.' (10ii§30: QC,

1268) Thereafter Gramsci goes on to develop his own critique. Pantaleoni's concept of *homo oeconomicus* as put forward in this work was ultimately based upon a biological view of human nature and thus represented a return to the view of economics as based on natural science. Gramsci objects both to this substantive conclusion and to the methodology employed by Pantaleoni to arrive at it. His concept of *homo oeconomicus* was arrived at by drawing a minimum common denominator, which becomes biological man. Gramsci contrasts this with the process of abstraction that he deems appropriate to economics. This consists in isolating the defining or essential traits of 'a determinate historical category,' understood precisely as a category and 'not as a multiplicity of individuals.' *Homo oeconomicus* itself is 'a determinate abstraction' (10ii§32i: QC, 1276), presumably in the sense of representing the defining or essential traits of the individual in a historically defined market society, for example as found in juridical formulations. Certainly, the abstraction is limited in scope. When we speak about 'capitalists' we effectively employ an abstraction for 'the multiplicity of individuals from economic agents of modern society' that belong to this category, but, Gramsci emphasizes again, 'the abstraction is within the historical context of a capitalist society and not within [the context of] a generic economic activity which abstracts in its categories all the economic agents that have appeared in world history generically and indeterminately reducing them to biological man.' (QC, 1277)

Gramsci's objection to the notion of *homo oeconomicus* of 'neoclassical' or pure economics and the methodology used to arrive at it, do not imply a rejection of the notion altogether. On the contrary, he expressly and unequivocally endorsed it, albeit on different bases and with a different methodology than those employed by 'neoclassical' or pure economics. A clear statement on the question is made by Gramsci in a note titled 'Cultural arguments. Formal logic and scientific mentality.' The note was written by Gramsci as a single draft in one of the later miscellaneous notebooks. It probably dates from 1935 and it is thus a retrospective summary of earlier reflections. The note criticizes modern scientific mentality for its failure to appreciate both the commonalities and the differences

between the processes of abstraction in the natural and human sciences, using the concept of *homo oeconomicus* as an example and asserting its scientific validity. As far as the commonalities are concerned, Gramsci emphasizes that natural sciences, economics and historical sciences all rely on some form of abstraction, contrary to the nominalist objection that asserted historical facts, and in some cases economic ones too, to be uniquely individual phenomena that had to be studied as such. In this discussion, Gramsci unequivocally endorsed the use of *homo oeconomicus*: 'The so-called "homo oeconomicus",' is 'a fundamental concept of economic science, equally plausible and necessary as all the abstractions upon which natural sciences are based (and also, albeit in a different form, the historical or humanistic sciences).' Speaking still of 'all the abstractions,' or of the generic process of abstraction across all sciences, he goes on to argue that, 'if the distinctive concept of homo oeconomicus had been unjustified *for its abstractness*, the H_2O symbol for water would be equally unjustified, since in reality there is no such thing as an H_2O water, but an infinite quantity of individual "waters." The vulgar nominalist objection would regain all its vigor etc.' (17§52: QC, 1948, my emphasis) But Gramsci also emphasizes that there are differences in the process of abstraction between the various sciences. Just as with his argument against Bukharin, who had failed to appreciate the differences in methodology between the different sciences, he highlights that a particular failure of scientists is to understand only the process of abstraction that is specific to their field and assume that this is the only valid one, whereas 'it should be maintained that there exist various types of abstraction.' (QC, 1948)

5.3 – The Critique of Croce and Pure Economics

The full significance of Gramsci's endorsement of the concept of *homo oeconomicus* emerges in the context of his engagement with Croce's essays on Marxian economics. It is in engaging these essays that Gramsci took a stance on the other crucial bone of contention at the heart of the *methodenstreit*. This was the contrast between the empirical-inductive procedure of the historical school and the axiomatic-deductive procedure of 'neoclassical' or 'pure economics' as it was then known. A certain notion of the individual as *homo oeconomicus*

constituted one of the fundamental axioms of pure economics, from which a number of theorems were deduced in a mathematical fashion, as well as employing advanced mathematical techniques. Croce had endorsed the axiomatic-deductive procedure of pure economics and sought to incorporate it in his neoidealist philosophy, making economic behavior one of the two practical moments of the (human) Spirit, the other being ethical behavior. Most importantly, Croce had rejected the claims made by Marxism – and by Marxian economics in particular – to be a science. For Marxism to be a science, it would have had to follow the axiomatic-deductive procedure, something that it signally failed to do. Gramsci set out to reject Croce's criticism, showing both that his synthesis was faulty and that economics need not be built exclusively on the axiomatic-deductive model of pure economics, but that it should include the latter model for particular social phenomena. Here we should consider first Croce's criticism of Marxism and then Gramsci's criticism of Croce's positions, the upshot of which was to conceive of economics as partly based on the empirical-inductive procedure, as suggested by the historical school, and partly on the axiomatic-deductive procedure of pure economics.

Croce's critique of Marxian economics is laid out in the volume *Historical Materialism and Marxian Economics*, with which Gramsci was well acquainted, as we have seen. The best-known part of Croce's critique is its relegation of Marxism to a 'canon of historical investigation,' no more than a useful heuristic device drawing attention to the importance of economic factors in historical development. The most that Croce was willing to concede was that Marxism had laid the foundations for a comparative economic sociology addressing the conditions of labor in different societies. Gramsci summarizes the main points of this critique in a specific note (10ii§41viii) and seeks to respond to them elsewhere. But he also addresses a more fundamental point of Croce's critique that was in fact the very foundation of his whole attack on Marxian economics. Croce argued that Marxism had produced neither a general economic science, nor even a scientific description of capitalism alone. To do so would have involved deriving the laws that governed economic life from basic principles in the way

undertaken by Pantaleoni and Pareto (Croce 1961, 59-60, 73). In fact Croce's paragon of economic science was pure economics with its axiomatic-deductive procedure. This approach, together with the concept of *homo oeconomicus* essential to it, had been promoted by the 'marginalist revolution,' which, with the exception of the 'Austrian school' again, had emphasized the use of advanced mathematical techniques to the point that economics was likened to mathematics or even reduced to a mathematical formalism. The axiomatic-deductive procedure was thus fundamentally opposed to social and historical approaches. Taking his cue from pure economics, Croce had suggested that a science of economics had to start from the concept of *homo oeconomicus* and logically and systematically derive laws governing economic behavior from it (Croce 1961, 78).

Gramsci criticized Croce's position on pure economics by introducing two important qualifications to it. The first qualification concerned the very definition of economic behavior and thus of *homo oeconomicus.* In his earliest writings Croce endorsed the 'hedonistic postulate' and Pantaleoni's view of *homo oeconomicus*. Sensing perhaps that this led pure economics back to natural science, he later argued against the use of experimental psychology to provide the basis for economics. It was around this time that Pareto made his argument for understanding economics solely as a science studying the 'act of choice,' unconcerned with the possible motivations for the choice. In letters that were published together with his essays, Croce rejected this approach too and laid the ground for his 'economic philosophy.' This was based upon an idealist notion of economic activity as one of the abstract categories of the (human) Spirit. This entails a notion of economic activity as the efficient application of the available means to one's ends. Although defined in idealist language as one of the categories of the spirit, his definition of economics was arguably analogous to Weber's definition of means-ends rationality in human behavior. It also effectively preserved the marginalist view of the individual as a rational actor. Gramsci's objection to this approach is that it made for an enormously broad view of economic activity. Economics thus becomes a general category encompassing

all aspects of human activity to which considerations of economy or efficiency can be applied.

The point is made most clearly in a note on a review of a work by the economist Lionel Robbins on the nature of economic science. 'For Robbins too "economics" ends up having a most broad and generic meaning, which hardly coincides with the concrete problems that economists really study, and coincides instead with what Croce calls a "category of the spirit", the economic or "practical moment", that is the rational relation between means and ends.' (15§43: QC, 1803) In Robbins' case the definition of economics focused on the relation between means and ends in situations in which there was a scarcity of means as well as alternative uses for them. Gramsci also raised another objection to Robbins' work that applies equally well to Croce's. 'It would seem that Robbins thus wants to free economics from the so-called "hedonistic" principle and sharply separate economics from psychology,' Gramsci observes, while immediately expressing doubts about Robbins' success in doing so. 'It remains to be seen whether the structuring that Robbins gives to the economic problem is not in general a demolition of marginalist theory … In fact if individual evaluations are the only source of explanation of economic phenomena, what does it mean [to say] that the field of economics has been separated from the field of psychology and utilitarianism?' (QC, 1803)

The second qualification introduced by Gramsci to Croce's endorsement of pure economics concerns the relationship between economics with its axiomatic-deductive procedure and mathematics. Croce has likened economics to mathematics, not only for its axiomatic-deductive procedure, but also for its ability to transcend historical settings, something that Gramsci was only partially willing to countenance. This stands out in his remarks on Croce's comparison between economics and arithmetic, in an article in *La Critica*, to the effect that economics does not change depending upon the social order, be it communist or capitalist, in the same way as arithmetic does not change depending upon the kind of things that we count. (10ii§32iii) Elsewhere Gramsci draws attention to the need to address and properly set up the problem 'as to whether there can exist a

science of economics and in what sense.' His answer is positive, although it emphasizes the peculiarity of economics. 'It seems to me that economic science stands on its own, that it is a unique science, because it cannot be denied that it is a science and not only in the "methodological" sense, that is in the sense that its procedures are scientific and rigorous.' Its peculiarity stands out with respect to mathematics. 'It also seems to me that it cannot be made [too] close to mathematics, although among the various sciences mathematics is perhaps the closest of all to economics.' Certainly, economics ought to be distinguished from natural sciences, but this does not mean for Gramsci that it is quite an 'historical science' either: 'At any rate economics cannot be deemed a natural science (whatever is the way of conceiving nature, be it subjectivist or objectivist) nor an "historical" science in the common sense of the term, etc.' (10ii§57: QC, 1350)

Gramsci in fact defends the peculiar status of economic science as partly historical and partly an abstract axiomatic-deductive science against Croce. Specifically citing Croce's criticisms in *Historical Materialism and Marxian Economics*, he argues that in fact Marxism has sought the right balance between inductive and deductive procedures. (10ii§37i) He asks, moreover, whether the type of hypothesis made by Marxism, which is partly historical and partly abstract, is not better than the exclusively abstract type made by pure economics (10ii§38i). Gramsci's position is succinctly and precisely stated in the context of the discussion of summaries of Marx's *Capital* and, in particular, of the planned fourth volume. Here Gramsci emphasizes that 'the whole conception of critical economics is historicist' but immediately goes on to add that 'this is not to say that it should be confused with the so-called historical school of economics.' (10ii§37ii: QC, 1286) For Gramsci the foundations of Marxian economics lay in a combination of inductive and deductive, or historical and abstract, procedures. This is in so far as economics is concerned. But Gramsci also considered another type of economic study that also had claims to scientific validity: the historical study of the structure or base of society, the mainstay of the Marxist theory of history. The historical study of the structure, Gramsci emphasized, also had a claim to scientific validity, albeit of a different kind than economics proper. This

difference was highlighted by their different relationship to the notion of scientific law. We should consider the historical study of the economic structure of society as defined by Gramsci, before considering how economics proper was for Gramsci partly inductive and partly deductive. In fact, the possibility of a deductive science of economics depended upon actual characteristics of the economic structure that could be scientifically ascertained.

5.4 – The Historical Study of the Economic Structure

Marxism's claim to scientific validity was based upon its emphasis upon the economic structure of society in historical explanation. Yet Croce denied the Marxist study of the structure any scientific validity and went on to dismiss it as purely speculative. Croce argued that Marxist theories of history were essentially a form of materialist metaphysics, conceiving of the structure transcendentally, as being over and above history rather than immanent to it, so that it became akin to the inscrutable or 'unknown god' of theology and it was studied 'speculatively.' Gramsci's response to Croce's criticism was twofold and it emphasized in each case the central importance of the study of the economic structure. On the one hand, Gramsci asserted that the study of the structure was not speculative but scientific. Only, this was in a different sense than that in which an axiomatic-deductive discipline such as economics could be considered scientific. Nor did this scientific study imply that the structure followed historical laws of evolution that were over and above history. On the other hand, Gramsci emphasized that developments in the structure of society laid the foundations for certain specific social phenomena, though not the evolution of the structure itself, to behave with law-like regularity. Gramsci's twofold answer is set out in the introductory part to Notebook 10, summarizing his criticisms of Croce's philosophy. Here Gramsci points out that in fact the structure 'should not be conceived speculatively, but historically, as the ensemble of the social relations in which actual men move and operate, as an ensemble of objective conditions that can and ought to be studied with the methods of "philology" and not "speculation".' (10i§8: QC, 1225) The two parts of Gramsci's answer are, first, that the structure constitutes an 'ensemble of objective conditions' to be studied with the methods of philology

and, second, that the structure constitutes 'the ensemble of the social relations in which actual men move and operate.' This arguably refers to a fundamentally social and institutionalist view of the context of economic activity.

The first part of Gramsci's answer, that the study of the economic structure is to be conceived of as a form of 'philology,' might seem puzzling at first. 'Philology' here refers however not to a specific approach based on linguistics, but, more generally, to the systematic and rigorous effort to trace a specific development and its causes through time. The study of the structure is thus a detailed historical study. It is still scientific, though, for Gramsci, who drew attention to its empirical and objective features, paralleling the notion of objectivity that he endorsed for experimental science. Far from being 'speculative,' Gramsci pointed out, the study of the economic structure is 'ultra realistic' and scientific in the sense of being accurate and verifiable. The structure in Marxism 'is conceived in an ultra realistic manner, such that it can be studied with the methods of the natural and exact sciences and in fact, precisely for this objectively verifiable [*controllabile*] "consistency," the conception of history [of Marxism] has been deemed "scientific".' (10ii§41i: QC, 1300) The possibility of studying the structure in a manner that is both accurate and verifiable makes it centrally important for historical study in general, certainly for any historical study that aspires to objectivity. It is indeed that aspect of the past that constitutes an incontrovertible document and this makes it centrally important for any historical study.

> How is one to understand the expression "material conditions" and the "ensemble" of these conditions? As the "past," as "tradition," concretely understood, objectively verifiable [*constatabili*] and "measurable" with methods of ascertainment [that are] "universally" subjective, that is precisely "objective." The operative present cannot but continue the past, developing it, it cannot but graft itself onto "tradition." But how to recognize the "true" tradition, the "true" past etc.? That is to say, real, effective, history and not the fancy of making new history that searches in the past for its tendentious, "superstructural," justification? The real past is precisely the structure, because it is the evidence, the incontrovertible "document" of what was done and continues to subsist as a condition for the present and the future. One might observe that in examining the "structure" individual critics can go wrong, asserting to be alive that which is dead or is not the seed of new life to be developed, but the method itself cannot be refuted peremptorily. It is certainly to be admitted that there is possibility

> of error, but it will be the error of individual critics (politicians, statesmen) not an error of method (10ii§59ii: QC, 1354).

The point is made just as starkly in the note on 'matter' that addresses Bukharin's *Popular Manual of Sociology*. 'The ensemble of the material forces of production is the element that is least variable in historical development, it is that [element] which time after time can be ascertained and measured with mathematical accuracy, which can thus give rise to observations and to experimental criteria and therefore to the reconstruction of a robust skeleton of historical becoming.' This is all the more important given the crucial function that the structure plays in historical development, since 'The ensemble of the material forces of production is both a crystallization of the entire past history and the basis of the present and future history, it is a document and at the same time an actual active propulsive force.' (11§30: QC, 1443)

The characterization of the 'material forces of production' as an 'actual and active propulsive force' of history, however, does not presume for Gramsci that these forces are in some ways linked to laws of historical development. In fact, their importance is linked by Gramsci to a conception of law that he attributes to Ricardo and that has nothing to do with any grand metaphysical historical scheme decreeing the succession of one upon another phase of development or mode of production. For Gramsci, Ricardo's contribution to Marxism was philosophical, as well as economic, in that he might have aided Marx in combating metaphysics and 'speculative' philosophy by formulating a new and more concrete concept of 'immanence.' However, the importance of this concept is tied by Gramsci to the way in which Marx came to understand historical development and economic science. This is clear from a note on 'Economic science' (8§128) that was reworked into an important note in Notebook 11 titled 'Regularity and necessity'. Here Gramsci asks, 'How did the concept of regularity and necessity in historical development arise in the founder of the philosophy of praxis? It does not seem that one can think about a derivation from the natural sciences, but it seems instead that one should think about a derivation from concepts that were born on the terrain of political economy,

especially in the form and methodology that economic science received from David Ricardo.' (11§52: QC, 1477) It is in this context that Gramsci suggests that one should establish whether Ricardo has been important for the philosophy of praxis well beyond the concept of value in economics, whether, in fact, 'he has had a "philosophical" importance, he has suggested a way of thinking and reading life and history.' Having sketched what he understood by the concept of 'determinate market' [*mercato determinato*] that he attributes to Ricardo, Gramsci concludes that 'It is necessary to start from these considerations to establish what "regularity," "law," "automatism" mean in historical events [*fatti*]. It is not a matter of "discovering" a metaphysical law of "determinism" nor of establishing a "general" law of causality.' (QC, 1479)

The note on 'Regularity and necessity' and its brief discussion of the concept of 'determinate market' also begin to sketch out the second part of Gramsci's answer to Croce's dismissal of the Marxian study of the structure as speculative. As we have seen, the structure constitutes for Gramsci 'the ensemble of the social relations in which actual men move and operate.' This is arguably a social and institutional view of the context of economic activity, which does not happen in a vacuum, but within a specific socio-historical context. Gramsci held, in particular, a fundamentally social and institutionalist view of the market and it is this view that is set out in the note on 'Regularity and necessity', which discusses the notion that market forces operate with a certain regularity and automatism. This social and institutionalist view of the structure as fundamental context for economic activity is closely linked to the traditional Marxian notion that there is a necessary inter-relation between superstructural institutions and the economic structure, a notion that Gramsci took from Labriola and worked into his concept of 'historical bloc.' The social and institutionalist view of the market transpires in Gramsci's definition of 'determinate market'. This expression in fact indicates for Gramsci an historically given market structure, which is defined first in terms of the balance of social forces involved and, secondarily, in terms of the superstructural institutions that sustain them and give them a permanent form. The 'concept and fact of "determinate market", [*mercato determinato*]' involves for

Gramsci the scientific effort to ascertain 'that decisive and permanent determinate forces have appeared historically,' that a certain economic structure has come into being that is sustained by adequate superstructural institutions, so that '"determinate market" is thus equivalent to saying "determinate ratio of social forces in a determinate structure of the production apparatus," a ratio ensured (that is rendered permanent) by a determinate political, moral and juridical superstructure.' (11§52: QC, 1477)

This view of the market as constituted by a balance of social forces rendered permanent by superstructural institutions also informs Gramsci's intervention in the contemporary Italian debate regarding the role of the state in the economy. Spurred by Spirito's dismissal of pure economics for its failure to take into account the role of the state in economic production, the debate saw Einaudi and the economist Rodolfo Benini intervene in defense of economics (Maccabelli 1998, 97-101). Gramsci notes that the authors talk at cross-purposes as they are referring to different things. He dismisses Spirito's position with the short comment that this position refers 'to his [Spirito's] speculative conception of the state, whereby the individual becomes identified with the state.' He pays more attention however to Einaudi's and Benini's contributions for what they reveal about the importance of state institutions in creating markets, something that Italian economists like Einaudi and Benini fully acknowledged. Einaudi refers to 'government intervention in economic facts,' which has two aspects that Gramsci recognizes. The first concerns government intervention 'as the "juridical" regulator of the market, that is as the force that bestows on the determinate market its legal form, in which all economic agents move on "a parity of juridical conditions".' The second aspect concerns government intervention as the creator of economic privileges that effectively 'alter competition in favor of determinate groups.' (10ii§20: QC, 1257-8) Benini refers to yet another conception of state intervention in economic life. When the state is identified with the interests of a social group, then state intervention is not only 'a preliminary condition of any collective economic activity,' but becomes 'an element of the determinate market, if not the determinate market itself, because it is the very political-juridical

expression of the fact whereby a determinate commodity (labor) is preliminarily depreciated, it is put in conditions of inferior competitiveness'. (QC, 1258)

Gramsci's observations on Ricardo's theory, despite their tentative tone and rather obscure stance, similarly emphasize the role of the balance of social forces and state institutions in creating the market, while also highlighting the importance of trade unions alongside the state. The note explicitly addresses Croce's dismissal of the labor theory of value as an 'elliptical comparison,' but in its theoretical position it also implicitly addresses the above debate. 'Ricardo's theory must be studied thoroughly,' Gramsci observes, 'especially his theory of the state as an economic agent, as the guarantor of property, that is, of the monopoly of the means of production.' This role, Gramsci seems to imply, is more important than just that of an external guarantor and ultimately becomes constitutive of the market itself, even though it does not completely determine the balance of social forces, partly because the state itself is 'the expression of the economic situation' and partly because trade unions have shown that they can alter the balance of forces in civil society 'even though the State itself has not changed.' (10ii§41vi: QC, 1310). The state together with institutions of civil society such as trade unions are thus indispensable to economic activity, indeed they constitute a 'determinate market'. Yet Gramsci in an aside within this very same note seems to imply that they can be taken for granted in constructing scientific models. If one studies economic facts, 'as a purely economic hypothesis, as Ricardo intended to do,' then one can overlook or take for granted the relations of social forces and all the institutions that constitute the market. This is possible, Gramsci implies, so long as we understand that what is involved is 'a theory resulting from the reduction of economic society to [the] pure "economic [aspect]" that is to the maximum determination by the "free play of economic forces",' a theory in which 'being the [starting] hypothesis that of homo oeconomicus,' one can disregard or take for granted the social and institutional context of economic activity (QC, 1310). This is indeed the preserve of economic science and of the tendential laws that it uncovers.

5.5 – Economic Science and Tendential Laws

Apart from the historical study of the economic structure, Gramsci conceived also of a study of economics that was scientific in that it applied the axiomatic-deductive method to derive laws. Only, its presuppositions were not universal, belonging to biological man, but concerned a historically specific setting or context for economic activity and equally specific assumptions regarding individuals' behavior. Assuming a certain 'determinate market' to be in existence and starting from a given *homo oeconomicus* as one of its assumptions, this economic science derived tendential laws that describe a certain tendency brought about by economic activity. Gramsci ascribed this view of economics to Ricardo. The key concepts of this view of economics are spelled out in a note reflecting on Ricardo's contribution to the formulation of an historically concrete concept of 'immanence' in the philosophy of praxis. In this note Gramsci asks whether 'the discovery of the formal logic principle of the "tendential law," which leads to defining scientifically the fundamental economic concepts of "homo oeconomicus" and "determinate market" … does not precisely imply a new "immanence," a new conception of "necessity" and freedom etc. ?' (10ii§9: QC, 1247) Here it is important to spell out first the inter-relation between the concepts of law, 'determinate market' and 'homo oeconomicus'. In keeping with Gramsci's view that economic science was partly axiomatic-deductive and partly empirical-inductive, these concepts described actual historical phenomena that could be observed at a certain point in time, rather than embodying timeless features belonging to biological man, for example. We will then consider how these inter-related concepts brought about 'a new conception of "necessity" and freedom'.

Law-like regularity and automatism is closely related to the existence of a certain 'determinate market' as the context of economic activity and of a specific 'homo oeconomicus' as description of individuals' behavior. In keeping with his view that economic science was partly empirical-inductive, Gramsci held that these concepts described not timeless categories but actual, specific historical constructs that came about at a certain point in history. At the same time, in keeping with his view that economic science was also partly axiomatic-deductive,

Gramsci considered these historical constructs to be the fundamental 'premises' that make possible both the law-like regularity of certain economic phenomena and the economic science that derives tendential laws describing these phenomena. The relationship is set out by Gramsci in his description of the actual historical premises that enable the creation of an economic science. For Gramsci, in fact, historical developments actually create the regularity or automatism with which certain social phenomena occur and thus also make an economic science possible. Marxian economics, he points out, ought to reflect precisely on the fact that

> there has been a period in which there could not be any "science" not only because there lacked scientists, but because there lacked *certain premises* that created that certain "regularity" or that certain "automatism," the study of which precisely gives origin to scientific research. *But the regularity or automatism can be of different types in different times and this will create different types of "sciences."* One should not believe that because there always existed an "economic life" so there always existed the possibility of an "economic science," in the same way as [one could believe that because] there always existed a movement of the stars so there always existed the "possibility" of a [science of] astronomy (10ii§57: QC, 1350, my emphases)

Note that for Gramsci different types of historical premises are possible that create a different 'regularity' or 'automatism'. Thus the initial task of economic science is to ascertain the actually operative premises and consequent regularity or automatism at work. This is the empirical-inductive part of economic science for Gramsci. It will then derive laws by the axiomatic-deductive procedure.

Gramsci makes clear elsewhere that the 'premises' of economic science included the existence of a 'determinate market' (*mercato determinato*) and a certain *homo oeconomicus*. Furthermore, he also makes clear that the last two concepts described actual historical phenomena that came into being at a certain point in time, rather than timeless constructs. A similar argument about the historical premises for economic science is made by Gramsci in discussing the possibility of a new science of economics. The question informing this argument is whether Marxian economics itself (and possibly pure economics) constituted a fundamentally new economic science. It was implicit in an earlier note discussing the differences in emphasis between Marxian and classical economics (10ii§23). Gramsci's answer is that it was not. The answer is interesting here not so much

for its imprecise contrast between Marxian and classical economics, which was criticized by Sraffa as he felt that Gramsci conflated classical and neoclassical economics (Badaloni 1992, 44). Rather, it is interesting for the argument that, although Marxian and (neo)classical economics stemmed from different interests, they actually addressed the same economic reality. This is made clear in the note on 'Regularity and necessity,' where Gramsci explicitly states that,

> to be able to talk about a new "science" or about a new structuring of economic science (which amounts to the same thing) it would be necessary to have shown that one has begun noticing *new relations of forces, new conditions, new premises, which is to say that a new market has been "determined" [determinato] with its own new "automatism"* and phenomenal manifestations that presents itself as something "objective," comparable to the automatism of natural facts. Classical economics has given rise to a "critique of political economy" but it does not yet seem that a new science or a new structuring of the scientific problem is possible. The "critique" of political economy starts from *the concept of the historicity of the "determinate market" and its "automatism" while pure economists conceive of these elements as "eternal," [as] "natural"*. (11§52: QC, 1478, my emphases)

The 'determinate market' with its law-like regularity and 'automatism' was actually operative at some point in history and could thus make possible an economic science describing this regularity and automatism, but these were not timeless or 'natural' as assumed by neoclassical economists. On the contrary, as Gramsci makes clear in this passage, different 'relations of force', different 'conditions' or 'premises', that is, different institutional setups, are possible, thus making possible different 'determinate markets'.

The same point regarding the actual historical creation of a 'determinate market' is made by Gramsci in the note where he spelled out his view of economics derived from Ricardo. The rise of economic science for Gramsci was made possible by the actual historical rise of markets and of economic individualism. Gramsci's conception of the rise of industrialism has been compared to Polanyi's as a broad fresco of social change in the transition to modernity (Maccabelli 2008, 609-10). But in fact it shares with it the premise that the 'great transformation' involved the rise and spread of markets and of the peculiarly modern form of economic individualism. For Gramsci, it is the actual rise of markets that made possible an economic science as proposed Ricardo. The

latter lived in a specific period of world history in which the density or frequency of economic transactions had become such that they could conceivably be the subject of economic laws. Gramsci suggests that a summary should be made of all his principles and, furthermore, that one should 'research the historical origin of these Ricardian principles which are connected to the rise of economic science itself, that is to the development of the bourgeoisie as a "concretely global" class and therefore to the formation of a global market already sufficiently "dense" with complex movements so that the necessary regularity laws can be isolated and studied.' (10ii§9: QC, 1247-8) But it was not just the possibility of repeatedly observing, isolating and studying certain social phenomena that enabled the rise of economic science. These 'tendential laws,' Gramsci goes on to suggest, are linked to the actual operations of defined market structures that had developed historically, as they 'are laws not in a naturalistic sense or [in the sense] of speculative determinism, but in an "historicist" sense in that a "determinate market" can be verified [to be in existence]'. (QC, 1248)

Elsewhere Gramsci explicitly adds the development of a specific 'economic man' or *homo oeconomicus* as another actual historical 'premise' for economic science, one that went hand-in-hand with the development of markets. 'Not for nothing economic science was born in the modern age, when the diffusion of the capitalist system has diffused a relatively homogeneous type of economic man, that is it has created the real conditions whereby a scientific abstraction became relatively less arbitrary and generically vacuous than was previously possible.' (10ii§37i: QC, 1284-5) This view is especially important for Gramsci's theory. Since Gramsci did not believe in a fixed biologically determined human nature inherent in each and every individual, with the only exception of the faculty of thinking, he saw the concept of *homo oeconomicus* as a useful abstraction that in fact originated in historically specific circumstances, which resulted in the widespread diffusion of a certain type of individualistic behavior. This is arguably a view of individualism that was shared by Marx (Sayers 2007, 88). The more interesting and original point made by Gramsci, however, is that different types of *homo oeconomicus* are possible. This is implicit

in his discussion of the different premises for the regularity and automatism of economic activity that we have seen above, as in his reference to 'a relatively homogeneous *type* of economic man' (my emphasis) in this last passage. It is also implicit in Gramsci's observation regarding homo oeconomicus as an abstraction for a specific or 'determinate' society:

> *Homo oeconomicus* is the abstraction of the needs and economic operations of a determinate form of society, just like the ensemble of the hypotheses supposed by economists in their scientific elaborations is nothing but the ensemble of the premises that are at the foundation [*base*] of a determinate form of society. One could conduct a useful work by systematically collecting the "hypotheses" of some great "pure" economist, for example M. Pantaleoni, and organize them in such a manner as to show that they are indeed the "description" of a determinate form of society. (10ii§27: QC, 1265, original emphasis)

'A new conception of "necessity" and freedom' was also implicit in Gramsci's discussion of how the combination of a 'determinate market' with a certain type of *homo oeconomicus* brought about the regularity or automatism that could be observed in economic activity at certain times in history. Gramsci saw the axiomatic-deductive procedure as a hypothetical procedure which he ascribed to Ricardo. He dubbed it the method of 'supposing that' and described it as a method simply based of the notion that, given certain starting assumptions, some consequences will follow. He sought to defend this method from the baseless accusation by Spirito that it was deterministic (8§216). Gramsci's defense, employing what for all intents and purposes is a micro-foundational account of economic laws, is set out in one of the earliest notes in Notebook 10, titled 'Freedom and "automatism".' Here Gramsci asks whether there is a necessary opposition between freedom and the 'so-called automatism' of economic laws. The reply that he gives also clarifies what he means by the latter. Freedom is in contrast with arbitrariness [*arbitrio*], or absolute discretion, not with automatism. In fact, Gramsci points out, referring to Ricardo's method, 'when Ricardo said "supposing these conditions" there will be these consequences in economics, he did not make economics itself "deterministic," nor was his conception [of human behavior] "naturalistic".' Rather, Ricardo observed that given certain premises for the activity of a certain social group, there occurs 'a development that can be

called automatic and that can be assumed as the development of certain laws that can be recognized and isolated with the method of the exact sciences.' (10ii§8: QC, 1245-6) Furthermore, emphasizing the individual bases of this automatic development in order to address the contrast between freedom and automatism, but thus also highlighting the micro-foundations of the automatism, Gramsci argues that 'At any moment in time there is a free choice, which occurs according to certain identical guiding lines for *a great mass of individuals or single free wills*, in so far as these have become homogeneous in a determinate ethico-political climate.' Nor should we assume that all individuals literally act in the same manner. On the contrary, there can be numerous arbitrary individual deviations from the guiding lines, 'but the homogeneous part predominates and "sets the law".' (QC, 1246, my emphasis)

The same micro-foundational account of economic laws and historicist interpretation of Ricardo's deductive method are provided in the note on 'Regularity and necessity'. A 'determinate market' is constituted by institutions sustaining a configuration of social forces, 'forces the operation of which presents itself with a certain "automatism" that enables a certain measure of "possibility of foreseeing" and of certainty for the future of *individual initiatives that consent to these forces* after having intuited them or scientifically ascertained them.' (11§52: QC, 1477, my emphasis) Economic laws are simply the abstract and formal expression of the possibility of modeling or, as it were, 'foreseeing' individuals' behavior given certain premises. This is all that is involved in Ricardo's 'method of "supposing that," of the premise that gives a certain consequence,' which for Gramsci seemed to have been one of the starting points for the founders of the philosophy of praxis (QC, 1479). Thus economic laws are not deterministic in a naturalistic sense, but simply spring from the ability to foresee individuals' behavior starting from the general 'ethico-political climate' in which individual free wills have matured, as well as from the institutional context of a 'determinate market'.

Conclusion

Gramsci expressly sought to make room, in his reconstruction of Marxism, for an economic science that assumed the existence of a 'determinate market' and of a certain *homo oeconomicus* in order to derive tendential laws. In so doing, he was trying to make room for that vision of economics that was brought forward by the 'marginalist revolution' and neoclassical economics. This was both axiomatic-deductive and definitely individualistic and Gramsci thus admitted the use of methodological individualism within the limits of certain market structures and the institutional settings defining them. But Gramsci thought that economic science was also partly empirical-inductive in that it started from the empirically ascertainable existence of both the premises for tendential laws and the actual existence of that regularity or automatism that underpinned them. This was the preserve of the historical study of the economic structure, which focused on the 'the ensemble of the social relations in which actual men move and operate'. This was entirely empirical-inductive, but it was scientific too, in the sense that it was quantifiable and verifiable. It was not, however, individualistic in the same sense in which economic science was individualistic. Rather, it was concerned more with aggregating across large numbers of individuals, to determine, amongst other things, the balance of social forces operating within a 'determinate market', sustained by a certain institutional setup. It was thus more akin to political economy understood as a discipline that blends the study of economics with the study of politics. For Gramsci, in fact, the study of economics proper was eminently individualistic, though it started from the assumption of a certain balance of social forces and the accompanying institutional setup that defined a 'determinate market'. The study of politics, instead, was eminently concerned with corporate actors or collective subjects.

6 – POLITICAL SCIENCE

Politics plays a key role in the *Prison Notebooks* and much scholarship has focused upon it. Indeed whole strands of Gramscian scholarship have been built upon Gramsci's elaboration of such key political concepts as civil society, the state and, of course, hegemony. This vast literature, however, has lost sight of Gramsci's foundational discussion of political science, that is, his discussion of the definition of political science and its place among other sciences within the philosophy of praxis. The relationship between economic and political sciences is especially relevant here. As we have seen, Gramsci deemed economics to involve the study of social phenomena in terms of the individuals composing them. That is, economics was particularly concerned with a category of social phenomena that could be deduced entirely from the properties of participating individuals and their disparate individual 'wills', with the proviso that this required taking for granted, or assuming, a certain balance of social forces and the institutions underpinning it, as in the concept of 'determinate market'. By contrast, Gramsci deemed political science to involve the study of corporate actors or collective subjects that could be seen as possessing a collective will. Integral to this conception of political science was a certain notion of organization and organizational work as key ingredients in the constitution of collective subjects. It is through organization that a multitude of disparate individuals were transformed into a collective subject. Gramsci in fact was no organicist, but a political activist convinced of the importance of organizational and cultural work. This was also essential to historical development, which could not take place by the influence of economic factors alone, but required also the necessary intervention of political, that is organizational, factors. This view of politics is in keeping with his discussion, concerning human nature, of man as 'essentially political' because necessarily involved in collective pursuits. It is this collective activity that is central to the study of politics, focused as it is upon collective subjects.

This argument is relevant to three points as outlined in the introduction. The first point concerns contemporary philological interpretations of Gramsci's work. These have brought out the importance of politics within Gramsci's work in two ways, both of which are complemented by the argument being developed here, namely, that the study of politics for Gramsci was focused upon organized collective subjects and contrasted with the study of economics proper, which focused upon isolated individuals. One way in which philological interpretations have brought out the importance of politics is in relation to the notion of the historical study of the structure, which, as we have seen, is akin to political economy for Gramsci. The notion of 'determinate market' that is central to this study presupposes for Gramsci a certain balance of social forces, a balance supported by the existing state institutions. It has been pointed out that this in turn presupposes the analysis of 'relations of force' (Frosini 2010, 113, 203), that is, the analysis of the balance of power among the different collective subjects within civil society. As we will see below, this balance of power arose on the basis of divisions within the economic structure, determining the relative weight of a class-in-itself within any given situation, with in addition the indispensable organizational work that ensured its transformation into a class-for-itself. It is in this form as a corporate actor with its representative bodies in trade unions and parties that a social class contributed to shaping a market. The other way in which contemporary philological interpretations of Gramsci's work have brought out the importance of politics is in relation to the concept of praxis. The latter is to be understood as quintessentially 'political praxis' or 'politics-praxis'. In fact political activity not only distinguished man as 'essentially political' but also played a key role in history (Frosini 2010, 17, 82, 85). As we will see below, this involved in Gramsci's conception a form of praxis as organized collective action that informed the whole of the superstructures and contrasted with the realm on individual action which was restricted to the economic sphere.

The argument in this chapter is relevant to a second point as outlined in the introduction, concerning the relationship between Gramsci and the contemporaries that he addressed. It is especially relevant to his relationship with

Croce. This has gone largely unremarked upon, as far as political science is concerned, because of Croce's silence on the subject matter. Here I will draw attention to the fact that Croce became a central target of Gramsci's critique precisely because of his limited and dismissive conception of politics. Even in this largely negative role, however, Croce played a large part in Gramsci's discussion of politics, certainly larger than other contemporaries' such as Mosca and Michels. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to enquire about Gramsci's relationship to these thinkers for a number of reasons. This is firstly, as outlined in the introduction, because of the suggestion that they were all elite theorists, Gramsci included. This view is nuanced below, where it is shown that Gramsci's conception of political elites as a permanent feature of society was very different from that associated with thinkers such as Michels, whose study of the party and party bureaucracy Gramsci knew and addressed, as well as from that of Mosca. Secondly, it is legitimate to enquire about the relationship between Gramsci and Mosca, Michels and Pareto because of their ties to Machiavelli. Indeed they all shared the Florentine secretary as an important referent (Medici 1990). Gramsci worked extensively on Machiavelli and there are numerous important parallels between the two, involving such key Gramscian concepts as hegemony and intellectual and moral reform (Fontana 1994, 3-5), while Mosca, Michels and Pareto have been collectively referred to as 'the heirs of Machiavelli' or the 'neomachiavellians' (Hughes 1977, 249, 252). However, this view is again nuanced below. It is not only that we cannot speak of Mosca, Michels and Pareto as constituting a uniform group of 'neomachiavellians'. Indeed it was Michels who first presented himself, Mosca and Pareto as a compact group, but it is unclear whether Mosca endorsed or even simply deserved the association as intended by Michels (De Mas 1981, 49, 53; Zarone 1990, 6, 143). But also and most importantly, it is clear that these theorists did not refer to Machiavelli extensively, certainly not as extensively as Gramsci did. The latter undertook both a study of Machiavelli's thought and, on the basis of this study, took the Florentine secretary as the paradigm for a realist approach to political science.

Lastly and most importantly, it is appropriate to compare Gramsci with Mosca, Michels and Pareto because they were all intent upon defining and developing a socially informed political science at this time in Italy. In particular, it has been suggested that all of them shared an empirical approach to the study of politics, together with a realist view of politics in general and democracy more in particular, that was part of a Machiavellian legacy in the approach to political science (Femia 1998, 54-6). Realism is indeed especially important to Gramsci as to Mosca, albeit in different forms (Zarone 1990, 152) and they can be argued to have also shared a realist approach to democracy that has been described as 'democratic elitism' (Finocchiaro 1999, 143, 205-6), following Peter Bachrach. But Mosca's influence on Gramsci and the parallels between the two should not be exaggerated. Apart from the fact that Gramsci embraced a democratic interpretation of Machiavelli and supported democracy far more emphatically and radically than Mosca did, Gramsci also emphasized the need for a systematic and thorough discussion of the foundations of political science rather more than Mosca did. To the extent that Gramsci took Mosca's efforts (and to a lesser extent Michels' too) as an example of how to found a socially informed political science, this was largely as a negative example. Indeed Mosca's work exhibits for Gramsci precisely the lack of a systematic, foundational framework within which to organize and address specific political questions, while Michels' work displays a merely mechanical, positivistic approach to organizing and addressing political questions. Indeed the most significant difference between Gramsci and the thinkers associated with the rise of modern political science in Italy, especially Mosca, is in the seriousness with which Gramsci undertook the task of defining political science and integrating it within a general philosophy of history, alongside natural science and economics.

The argument in this chapter is also relevant to a third point as anticipated in the introduction, namely, contemporary social theory. It is relevant, most of all, to the very notion of a socially informed political science or political sociology. Gramsci in fact defined political science precisely as the study of corporate actors or collective subjects, in contrast to economics, which was based on social

phenomena that were entirely explicable in terms of individuals. To be precise, Gramsci was no organicist and recognized that all collective subjects were ultimately made up of individuals and that there was nothing over and above individuals. In this sense, he was committed to what has been called 'ontological individualism' (Udehn 2001, 2). He even recognized a certain category of processes that concerned the creation of collective subjects out of a myriad of individuals' initiatives. These processes, which could be approached through a study of the individuals' participation in the socio-political process, explained characteristics of the resulting collective subject. However, in terms of explanation, Gramsci was committed to the notion of corporate actors or collective subjects. This was not just for reasons of convenience, although he would have likely supported the argument that for the sake of brevity we need not seek always to break down political phenomena in terms of their individual-level components. Gramsci was also committed to collective subjects in two other senses.

One sense involved the explanatory role that a single collective subject played vis-à-vis the individuals that composed it. Organizational considerations such as the definition and ratios of the roles of cadres and officers in an army were certainly important for Gramsci. In this sense he was close to the approach of contemporary schools that have been labeled 'institutional' and 'structural' individualism, since like these schools he saw explanation in terms of properties of the corporate actor or collective subject and not just of the individuals composing it (Udehn 2001, 226-7, 318-9). Indeed Gramsci endorsed the notion that there is a category of social phenomena which are not reducible exclusively to individual behavior but depend on organizational factors. Another sense in which Gramsci was committed to explanation in terms of collective subjects involved the explanatory role of a situation in which a plurality of collective subjects interacted with each other. This is also the sense in which Gramsci contributes the most to the study of power that distinguishes contemporary political sociology (Lukes 2005; Mann 1986). Indeed he set out his vision for a socially informed political science not just in terms of the constitution of

collective subjects, but of their interactions too, which he set out in his framework for the analysis of 'relations of force', or the balance of power among a plurality of collective subjects.

For Gramsci, political science is to be defined as the study of 'relations of force' in society, where 'forces' are concretely understood as organized collective subjects. Eight aspects of Gramsci's reflections on political science are considered in this chapter. (1) Gramsci's discussion of Machiavelli and the foundations of political science develops essentially out of the criticism of Croce and the reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, rather than an engagement with the 'Machiavellians'. An important question to be addressed is the autonomy of political activity and its science from economic activity and its science. (2) One aspect of this autonomy is substantive and concerns claims that political change is not an immediate reflection of economic change, that the superstructure is not an immediate reflection of the structure of society. This is set out by Gramsci in his arguments against economism and spontaneism, which also begin to show the importance that Gramsci attached to organizational considerations in general. (3) Another aspect of this autonomy is strictly related to the definition of political science as the study of collective subjects or forces that can be seen as possessing a collective will. Gramsci focuses on cultural/ideological and especially organizational work in the constitution of these subjects. The question of formal organization, in fact, is essential to Gramsci's critique of both Croce and, subsidiarily, of the 'Machiavellians'. (4) Organization is emphasized by Gramsci in reaction against Croce's definition of politics, but it also deviates from Michels' understanding of formal rule-bound organization, or bureaucratization, and the threat that it represents for politics. (5) Gramsci's critique of Croce and the 'Machiavellians' extends to their treatment of elites, a question over which Gramsci takes Croce and Mosca to task. (6) The result of all this critical work is a definition of political science as the study of 'relations of force' which is a profound re-working of Croce's theory of distinctions, seeing each 'force' as a permanent organization. (7) The framework for the analysis of 'relations of force' involves the interaction between economy and politics. In fact, Gramsci sees

corporate actors or collective subjects as grounded in socio-economic groups, that is, social classes. (8) Ultimately, both economic and political factors are necessary for Gramsci to explain historical development, hence the crucially important role of political science alongside economics in his theory.

6.1 – The Development of the Notes on Political Science

Politics is arguably the most recurrent theme in the Notebooks, whether on its own or together with culture, as in the study of hegemony. There is also, more in particular, a sustained effort to lay the foundations for a science of politics within the reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. Much of Gramsci's reflection on the foundations of political science is concentrated in Notebook 13, titled 'jottings on Machiavelli's politics'. A number of observations were jotted down in the miscellaneous Notebooks 14 and 15 too, under the rubric 'Machiavelli'. Finally, there are also a number of important notes criticizing Croce's conception of politics in Notebook 10. Indeed it is vis-à-vis Croce's philosophy and interpretation of Marxism that Gramsci frames his approach to political science as a study of Machiavelli. Machiavelli in this case becomes a metaphor for a realist study of politics that is conceived by Gramsci as a 'modern *Prince*', with its protagonist being not an individual, as in Machiavelli's own work, but an organization, the modern party. Gramsci stresses, in fact, that today only an organization can fulfill the function once fulfilled by individual princes. Two sets of considerations about Gramsci's outline for a 'modern *Prince*' are relevant here. The first concerns the relation between the definition of political science and the philosophical notes, including the notes on Croce. Indeed Notebook 13 has been approached together with Notebooks 10 and 11, as one of the 'philosophical notebooks' (Kanoussi 2010, 41, 58). The second set of considerations concerns the relationship between the 'Machiavellians' (Mosca, Michels and Pareto) and Gramsci's own reflection on Machiavelli and political science.

Scattered notes testify to an early interest in politics on Gramsci's part that would continue throughout the Notebooks. The study of the political party, for example, is present in Gramsci's work from the very beginning. A number of

notes on this subject were already jotted down in Notebook 1. Gramsci's early project for a study of the Risorgimento includes the study of parties (1§44; 1§46) and of political and military leadership in general (1§114-5; 1§117-9) during the process of national unification. These reflections would later be copied and developed in Notebook 19, which is devoted to the Risorgimento. Other notes yet would end up in the very notebook on Machiavelli's politics. An early note on Machiavelli as a man of his times, belonging to the period of the passage from feudalism to national states and absolutist monarchies (1§10), would later be copied to Notebook 13, where this approach to the Florentine's thought is maintained. Two notes on Charles Maurras and his *Action Française* would also be copied to Notebook 13 (1§48; 1§53), the example of French politics having a special place in Gramsci's elaboration of political science (Gervasoni 1998, 12-4). So too did other short notes on the question of centralization in organizations (1§54), on leadership skills (1§79) and on Gentile's observations on the relationship between political activity and political ideology (1§87). All of these, however, constitute no more than scattered notes devoid of any specific organizing principle.

A clear organizing principle emerges, albeit in bare outline, in Notebook 4, in the section titled 'Notes on Philosophy. Idealism and Materialism. First Series'. Here Gramsci sketches for the first time the project for a 'modern *Prince*' that is at the basis of Notebook 13. It is here, too, that the Machiavelli rubric appears in forms that suggest a link with the reconstruction of Marxism: 'Machiavellianism and Marxism' (4§4); 'Machiavelli and Marx' (4§8); 'Marx and Machiavelli' (4§10). In this last note, in particular, Gramsci spells out that the parallel between Marx and Machiavelli can lead to a twofold work. One aspect of this work would draw attention to the 'real relations' between Marx and Machiavelli as militant political theorists. The other aspect would draw from Marxist doctrine 'an orderly system of actual politics along the lines of *The Prince*.' (4§10, PN, 152) Key themes of this 'modern *Prince*' and their relevance to the reconstruction of Marxism are laid out in a lengthy later note in this 'First Series' of philosophical notes. It is titled 'Relations between the structure and

superstructures' (4§38) and it will be taken up in two separate important notes in Notebook 13, namely, the note on the analysis of situations through the analysis of relations of force (13§17) and the note on economism (13§18). These notes deal, respectively, with the balance of political and military, that is, superstructural, forces that emerges on the basis of the balance of socio-economic or structural forces, and with the relative independence of politics from economics, asserted by Gramsci against economistic determinism.

At this early stage, therefore, Gramsci's approach to political science and discussion of its foundations, including the Machiavelli metaphor, are formulated within the context of his reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. Thereafter Gramsci's reflections on political science proceed separately from his reflections on philosophy. Only one note (7§10) from the 'Second Series' of the 'Notes on philosophy. Idealism and Materialism' will be copied in Notebook 13. None will be copied from the 'Third series'. Much if not most of the work that will go into the making of Notebook 13, in fact, is first jotted down in the miscellaneous section of Notebook 8 and in the miscellaneous sections of Notebook 9. Nevertheless, all the later reflections follow the organizing principle first sketched in Notebook 4. Under the rubric 'The modern *Prince*' a number of notes (8§21; 8§37; 8§48) suggest how such a work could present maxims of political science within the framework first sketched in Notebook 4. Most importantly, Gramsci's reflections still continue to address key questions for the reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis. For example, the question of the relation between structure and superstructures, which is highlighted as 'the crucial problem of historical materialism' (4§38), is taken up in the later note on 'Structure and superstructure' (7§10) that will be copied to Notebook 13. This note explicitly refers back to observations made in the 'First series' and it too addresses problems of economism.

The main intellectual referent for this discussion of economism in politics, as well as for the Machiavelli metaphor, remains Croce. The early notes on Machiavelli and Marx in Notebook 4 are mixed with notes on 'Croce and Marx' addressing the autonomy of political ideology (4§15; 4§20; 4§22) that will be

taken up in Notebook 10. A later note in the miscellaneous section of Notebook 4, titled 'Machiavelli and the "autonomy" of the phenomenon of politics' (4§56: PN, 231) links Gramsci's project for a 'modern *Prince*' with his discussion of Croce. Gramsci observes in this note that Machiavellianism and the associated debates constitute the ground or theme upon which political science was developed, at least in Italy (PN, 231). He also recalls Croce's characterization of Marx as the Machiavelli of the proletariat. Indeed Croce had expressed astonishment at the fact that nobody highlighted how Marx accomplished – only, for a modern political class – what Machiavelli had accomplished in his own time. (PN, 231) This was asserting the autonomy of political facts from both religious and moral considerations.

Gramsci's considerations on Mosca, Michels and Pareto follow both temporally and logically his prior considerations on Croce, as far as the discussion of Machiavelli and the foundations of political science are concerned. In fact it is only at a later date, probably in 1932, that Gramsci expands upon the subject of the political party (and of elites more in general) by addressing the work of the 'Machiavellians'. Michels' ideas on the political party are addressed at length in one note which ends up dismissing them as too schematic, too much in the mould of positivist sociology, although useful as a collection of empirical observations (2§75: PN, 324). Mosca's and Pareto's notions of the 'political class' and of the 'elite' are subsumed under the study of intellectuals in a brief note (8§24). Neither one of these notes would be copied to Notebook 13. Criticism of Mosca's concept of the 'political class', however, would be expanded upon in a note with the title 'Machiavelli. The modern *Prince*' (8§52), which explicitly recalls the organizing principle sketched out in Notebook 4 and would in fact be copied to Notebook 13. The largely negative view of Mosca's work is reiterated and expanded upon in a note (9§89: QC, 1155-6), which would be taken up in Notebook 19, on the Risorgimento, where Mosca's work appears merely as representative of a certain type of literature that flourished at the time of the decline of the influence of the landed aristocracy on Italian politics. For all these reasons the critique of the so-

called Machiavellians is addressed here together with the more explicit and full-blown critique of Croce under which it can be effectively subsumed.

6.2 – Economics and Political Science I: Against Economism

Gramsci's discussion of political science picks up from Croce's criticism that the superstructures cannot be reduced to mere 'appearance'. In a short note titled 'political science' Gramsci explicitly dismisses Croce's indictment that the label 'materialism' entails a reduction of social phenomena to coercion and/or economic fact (10ii§5). Croce attributes to historical materialism the claim that economic facts are the 'true reality' while ideological, juridical and other superstructural facts are 'deceitful appearance'. But in fact the philosophy of praxis recognizes that it is itself a superstructural construction and, most importantly, that social groups become conscious of their tasks on the terrain of the superstructure, precisely through such constructions (10ii§41x: QC, 1319). Starting from these premises, Gramsci develops a full-blown critique of economic reductionism in some notes in Notebook 13. These defend the autonomy of politics from economics and explicitly reject various forms of 'economism,' that is, the reduction of historical development to economic changes, so that all historical development is seen as a direct and immediate reflection of changes in the economic structure. We find this critique by Gramsci aimed at two distinct groups of theories: economism, or the theory that reduced political changes to changes in economic forces, as proposed by Lorianism and other similar intellectual currents; the theory which Gramsci sometimes distinguished from economism by dubbing it as 'spontaneism', or the theory that a political revolution would spontaneously arise out of economic crises, as proposed by Rosa Luxemburg. In criticizing this last theory Gramsci emphasizes the importance of the work of political organization as something in contrast to spontaneous reactions to economic crises.

Economism includes a number of different variants, three of which Gramsci addresses at some length in a note specifically devoted to the subject of economism (13§18). One of these variants is Loria's theory, which Gramsci dubs 'historical economism' and describes as characterized by three features: first, the

failure to distinguish the 'relatively permanent' changes in historical development from the mere 'occasional fluctuations;' second, a technological determinism that equates changes in the material forces of production with changes in technical instruments (as we saw in the previous chapter); third, the doctrine that the whole of historical change, starting with changes in the economic structure, depends upon some change in material forces of production. Gramsci objects to this that 'the discovery of new fuels and new motive powers, as of new raw materials to be transformed, certainly has great importance, because it can alter the position of individual states [in the balance of power], but it does not determine historical development, etc.' (QC, 1593) It is in this context that Gramsci recalls Engels' criticism against those who pretend to have in 'their pocket, all the history and all the political and philosophical wisdom concentrated in a little formula.' (QC, 1595)

The other variants addressed by Gramsci at some length are closely inter-related, in his view. They are economic liberalism and revolutionary syndicalism. The first is represented for Gramsci by Einaudi, while the second by Agostino Lanzillo, as well as Arturo Labriola and Enrico Leone. The main difference between the two variants for Gramsci is that economic liberalism is the ideology of a dominant class, while revolutionary syndicalism is essentially a subaltern ideology (QC, 1589). Otherwise, both shared a laissez-faire or free-trade ideology that implies the belief that the free play of economic forces will also give rise, by itself, to the appropriate (minimal) social and political institutions. For economic liberals, this was the night-watchman state, while for revolutionary syndicalists it was the trade union and later, when many of them converted to fascism, the fascist corporation. Indeed the current that took shape within the Italian Socialist Party under the banner of revolutionary syndicalism openly embraced free trade ideology, at least in the broad sense of invoking less state intervention and more free trade, besides the hedonistic postulate of marginalist economic theories à-la Pantaleoni (Gervasoni 2001, 182, 193; Monceri and Cubeddu 2001, 228, 243).

Both also shared, according to Gramsci, the fundamental misconception that the distinction between civil society and political society was an organic or

real distinction, rather than a chiefly methodological one (QC, 1590). For Gramsci, by contrast, it is impossible to conceive of economic activity, including and especially modern market activity, as independent and separate from the political activity which enables it. Hence Gramsci's criticism that, as a consequence of the previous failure, 'it is thus affirmed that economic activity belongs to civil society and that the state should not interfere in its regulation.' But, Gramsci goes on to emphasize, 'it ought to be established that [economic] liberalism too is a "regulation" of governmental character, introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means: it is a fact [or expression] of a will [that is] conscious of its ends and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of the economic fact.' (QC, 1590) Gramsci goes so far as to suggest that perhaps economism, in its most complete form, might be a derivation from laissez-faire or free trade ideology, rather than from historical materialism.

Another critique that Gramsci aims at revolutionary syndicalism also applied to other, more important, currents in the Socialist movement. This was the critique of spontaneism in political action, which Gramsci develops starting from a discussion of Luxemburg's work on mass mobilization. Without an autonomous work of organization, Gramsci implies, there cannot be a political revolution. The latter does not occur as a spontaneously arising consequence of increasing pressure from economic crises. Gramsci observes that Luxemburg was inspired by the 1905 events in Eastern Europe but still neglected the '*"voluntary" and organizational elements* which in those events had been much more widespread and efficient than Rosa [Luxemburg] was led to believe because of a certain "economistic" and spontaneist prejudice of hers.' (13§14: QC, 1613, my emphasis) Gramsci goes on to explore in this note the distinction between war of position and war of maneuver as metaphors for different kinds of political activity, which he borrowed from Trotsky to describe the differences between West and East European political arenas by analogy with the differences between military events in Western and Eastern Europe during the First World War and its aftermath (13§18: QC, 1616). Luxemburg's work, Gramsci acknowledges, remained 'one of the most significant documents of the theorization of the war of

maneuver as applied to the art of politics.' In this theorization, economic crises were like the field artillery that made breaches in enemy defenses. Socialist strategy was thus seen as being reliant on a succession of economic crises and general strikes to bring about a revolution. Indeed, Luxemburg's work envisaged a series of spontaneous or semi-spontaneous 'mass actions' or 'crowd actions' based on her own experience of the events of 1905-6 (Luxemburg 2010, 108). For Gramsci this was 'a form of strict economistic determinism, with the aggravating [factor] that effects were conceived as very rapid in time and space; therefore it was truly an historical mysticism, the expectation of some sort of miraculous occurrence [*fulgurazione*].' (13§14: QC, 1613-4).

Gramsci's criticism of Luxembourg's spontaneism was all the more acute in modern times, when permanent political organization has become pervasive throughout society, limiting the effects of economic crises. In fact, Gramsci's distinction between the war of position and that of maneuver in politics, as in actual warfare, pointed not just to a distinction between Western and Eastern political arenas, but also to an historical trend. Drawing from contemporary military theory, Gramsci emphasized that the war of position ought to be conceived alongside the war of maneuver and that indeed the former was increasingly displacing the latter, in politics as in actual warfare. This meant an increasing importance of organization. Gramsci observed that the war of position that had characterized much of the First World War had involved not only trench warfare, but also the mobilization of the '*entire organizational and industrial territory* that is behind the army in the field.' (13§24: QC, 1615, my emphasis) The metaphor of the war of position, therefore, was an especially apt metaphor for political struggle in modern industrial democracies, in which '"civil society" has become a very complex structure [that is] resistant to the "catastrophic" inroads of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.); [so that] the superstructures of civil society are like the system of trenches of modern warfare.' (QC, 1615) The distinction applied to the differences between Western and Eastern Europe, since in the latter civil society was relatively less developed vis-à-vis the state when compared with the former. However, Gramsci especially

highlighted here the broad historical trend within Western Europe towards greater complexity in civil society and its relation with the state.

In an earlier note Gramsci made a similar point regarding the effect upon the path to revolution of the increasing importance of organization in the life of the state and civil society. In this note, in fact, Gramsci emphasizes that the formula of the 'so-called "permanent revolution",' first proposed by Marx and Engels in 1850, 'belongs to an historical period in which *the great mass political parties and the great economic [trade] unions*,' that is, permanent organizations, 'did not yet exist and [in which] society was, so to speak, in a fluid state in many respects.' (13§7: QC, 1566, my emphasis) After 1870 and the period of European colonial expansion, however, fundamental changes made spontaneous collective action in direct response to economic pressures less important than it might have been in the past and give central place to the construction of hegemony:

> *the internal and international organizational relations of the state become more complex and massive* and the fortyeightist formula of the "permanent revolution" is elaborated and overtaken in political science by the formula of "civil hegemony" … *the massive structure of modern democracies, both as state organizations and as the complex of associations of civil life*, are for the art of politics like the "trenches" and permanent fortifications at the front in the war of position: they make the element of movement only a "partial" [element] whereas before it was the "whole" of war etc. (QC, 1566-7, my emphases)

This note begins with the laconic sentence/rubric referring to its contents: 'Question of the "collective man" or of "social conformism".' Implicitly, at least, it highlights the growing importance of collective action, and especially permanently organized collective action, in modern societies characterized by a massive expansion of both civil society and the state.

6.3 – Economics and Political Science II: Collective Will and Subjects

As we will see in the next part, Gramsci shared with Weber and Michels an interest in and concern with the growing weight of formal organization in modern times. Before we address this point, however, it is important to consider that for Gramsci organization is integral to the very definition of politics, because it is integral to his notion of collective subjects, or corporate actors that are permanently organized and express a collective will. Most importantly, the latter

is central to his definition of politics, in contrast to economics. Economics is concerned with studying the behavior of individuals *qua* individuals, that is as a mass of separate individuals all making their separate individual decisions. These can be approached as a statistical aggregate and as subject to precise 'tendential laws'. Not so in the study of politics. In his critique of Bukharin's work, Gramsci emphasizes that the aggregate result in politics is no mere statistical aggregate and cannot be studied as a result spontaneously arising from a multitude of separate individual 'wills'. Statistical law can only be applied in politics until the masses remain passive. Political activity destroys the 'law of large numbers' (11§25: QC, 1429-30) and politics is concerned precisely with studying more or less organized groups of individuals who act in concert as if their decisions sprang not from a multitude of individual 'wills' but, as it were, from a single collective will. Here it is important to consider first the notion of collective will in relation to that of collective subject and then its relationship to methodological individualism. For Gramsci, in fact, collective will did not entail an abstract legal concept, but a concrete result of cultural and organizational work. This was compatible with a commitment to ontological individualism, that is, the view that collective subjects are constituted of individuals. It is only in terms of social *explanation* that Gramsci emphasizes the importance of a collective will.

The notion of collective will plays a fundamental role in Gramsci's project for a 'modern *Prince*'. The very first note in Notebook 13 concludes by highlighting 'two fundamental points … that should constitute the structure of the work' (13§1: QC, 1561). The first concerns the formation of a 'national-popular collective will'. Indeed, for Gramsci, Machiavelli's *Prince* is to be understood as a work that seeks to contribute to the formation of a determinate 'collective will' (QC, 1555). The second concerns the process of 'intellectual and moral reform'. This too is related to the development of a collective will. Indeed for Gramsci 'the modern Prince must and cannot but be the proponent and organizer of an intellectual and moral reform, which means creating the terrain for a further development of the popular national collective will towards the achievement of a superior and all-round modern civilization.' (QC, 1560) It is possible to draw a

parallel between Gramsci's concept of 'collective will' as sketched out in these passages and Rousseau's concept of 'general will'. In this view, Gramscian hegemony plays an analogous role to the notion of 'social contract' in that it implies an overcoming of individual 'wills' into a more general collective will (Coutinho 2000, 2, 15). Indeed the 'moment of hegemony' for Gramsci implies a passage from particularistic to general or universal interests, as we will see below. Here it is important to emphasize, however, that Gramsci's insistence on collective will does not mean that he conceived of an abstract general will à-la Rousseau, nor of abstract organic entities possessing a consciousness à-la Durkheim. Gramsci's references to collective will and the subjects possessing them are the references of a political activist devoting his attention to political science and the study of power while in jail. For Gramsci, therefore, this collective will is the attribute of collective subjects concretely understood as the product of cultural and organizational work.

Gramsci's conception of language and culture, as befits a theory that emphasizes practice in history and the social in human nature, is eminently concrete. In this theory, language and culture emerge in the interaction among individuals and are key enablers of collective action. The very notion of collective will and collective subjects – what Gramsci occasionally calls 'collective man' – is based upon this conception of culture. A note on the 'Question of the "collective man" or of "social conformism"' points to the importance of ideology as emerged in Croce's review of Giovanni Malagodi's work on *Political Ideologies* (13§7). But the interaction between language and culture on the one hand and collective action on the other hand, is most clearly stated by Gramsci with reference to Vailati's work and the pragmatic view of language. Gramsci emphasizes the importance of culture and language as unifying factors that allow different individuals to communicate and understand each other (10ii§44: QC, 1330). It is the need for a common medium of expression and for shared values or pursuits in collective action that determined the importance of cultural work: 'From this one can deduce the importance that the "cultural moment" has also in

(collective) practical activity: an historical action [or deed] can only be accomplished by the "collective man"' (QC, 1331), that is, by a collective subject.

Organizational work is if anything even more closely related to the formation of collective subjects as conceived by Gramsci. Indeed these are conceived not as crowds or mobs, but as permanent organizations held together by a formal internal organizational structure and hierarchy. The second note of Notebook 13, following the twin themes of the formation of a 'collective will' and the 'intellectual and moral reform' at the end the previous note, poses the question of power, understood as relations of forces, at the heart of political science. It also goes on to emphasize the centrality of the study of 'manning', or the science of organization, to any work of political science. 'Together' with the study of power, Gramsci states, 'one should put forward the presentation of what ought to be understood in politics by strategy and tactics, by strategic "plan," by propaganda and agitation, by manning [*organica*], or the *science of organization and administration in politics*.' (13§2: QC, 1561-2, my emphasis) The centrality of organization to Gramsci's conception of collective subjects in politics emerges also from a later note proposing the application of the 'Theorem of definite proportions' in political science. This theorem had been put forward by Pantaleoni in economics and ultimately referred to the optimal proportions of different inputs in a given production process (13§31: QC, 1626-7). Adapted to political science, it would have referred to the optimal proportions of different grades or levels in an organization.

Because of his emphasis upon the concrete molding of collective subjects out of a multitude of individuals through cultural and organizational work, Gramsci's approach is compatible with a commitment to ontological individualism. Indeed, despite his emphasis upon the creation of a collective will and a collective subject, Gramsci never loses sight in the *Prison Notebooks* of the fact that individuals ultimately constitute any group. Attention to the individuals constituting groups ensures that Gramsci never conceives of groups as organisms existing over and above individuals. On the contrary, this conception is dismissed by Gramsci as a form of fetishism. '*A collective organism is constituted of single*

individuals, who form the organism in that they have given themselves and actively endorsed *a hierarchy and a determinate direction*.' (15§13: QC, 1769-70, my emphases) A fetishistic conception of the group arises when some of these individuals move away from such a concrete conception of the group and begin to conceive of it, instead, as something existing over and above its individual constituent parts (QC, 1770). What is most important for Gramsci is the common direction adopted and the internal (hierarchical) structure. The first is the product of cultural work aimed at providing a uniform set of goals and values which guide the action of individuals. The internal structure is the product of organizational work, of the building up of a group structure constituted of various grades or levels of personnel, with different functions and roles.

Moreover, Gramsci specifically identifies 'molecular' processes, occurring repeatedly at the level of individuals, as the constituent processes whereby a collective will and subject are formed. One could approach the formation of a collective will, he observes, by this kind of extremely detailed, capillary study seeking to trace the myriad of acts, conversations etc. whereby each and every individual has been won over to the collective subject with its worldview and agenda (8§195). The social characteristics of this process of individual adhesion to a collective subject ultimately influence the kind of subject that is created. Building up on a suggestion by Michels, Gramsci observes that, in contrast to the upper classes, the broader stratum of the rural bourgeoisie in Italy produced numerous 'restless intellectuals who were easily [mobilized] as "volunteers",' a characteristic that explains the paradox of participation of relatively large numbers of individuals to national causes, but the lack of truly popular participation, or mass participation by an entire social group. Rather, they produced parties that were more like nomadic gatherings than permanent, well-organized and disciplined political forces (13§29: QC, 1623-4). Individual-level processes also distinguished political phenomena like *trasformismo* in Italy. This was the piecemeal, individual passage from one political force to another, for example, from the *Partito d'Azione* to the Moderate Party in the Risorgimento (15§11: QC, 1767).

6.4 – The Critique of Croce and The Machiavellians I: Bureaucratization

The emphasis on organization, including hierarchical organization and military metaphors, should not lead one to confuse Gramsci with the so-called 'Machiavellians'. Michels is most relevant here. Gramsci shared with him and Weber a concern with the growth of formal rule-bound organization, or bureaucratization, in all aspects of life, including party politics. But in Gramsci's esteem, growing organization does not have a stranglehold on political life, as he envisages both countertrends and alternatives to bureaucratization. Moreover, the chief referents or targets of Gramsci's critique are Croce and Sorel, with their theories of politics emphasizing spontaneity or mob action to the exclusion of all organizational considerations. It is chiefly against Croce and Sorel (but also with an eye to Michels and Weber) that Gramsci elaborates on the importance of organization in political life. In the Notebook on Croce, Gramsci sets as a key task a critique of his ethico-political history, including in particular his conception of politics as passion, which he criticizes drawing attention to standing armies and the existence of civilian and military bureaucracies (10i§7: QC, 1223). Ultimately, the critique of Croce's definition of politics as passion amounts to a critique of his entire approach to political science, of the very way in which he sets up political science (10ii§41v: QC, 1307). If Croce's theory were true, Gramsci remarks, political science would be like a clinical medicine for passions and so it is in fact in Croce's writings (QC, 1308). But if Gramsci draws nearer to Michels and Weber, he also departs from them, especially from Michels, because of his views on party politics. Here it is important to review first Gramsci's critique of Croce and Sorel, showing how he drew nearer to Weber and Michels in the process. Then, we should consider how he departed from Weber and Michels too, in the manner that he conceived of countertrends and alternatives to bureaucratization.

Both Croce and Sorel, in their different ways, conceive of politics exclusively as mass participation around a myth that acts as mover. They are, in a sense, the non-materialist, idealist and culturalist equivalent of Luxembourg's spontaneism. Whereas Weber and Michels see political activity as covering a whole spectrum – from mass mobilization around a charismatic personality and/or

high ideals, all the way to rigidly organized, rule-bound forms – Croce and Sorel only consider the first side of the spectrum. Politics to them is a feverish activity motivated by ideals which lead away from organized, daily activities. They do not see, as Weber and Michels do (and as Gramsci arguably does too), the tension between different forms of political activity. Gramsci develops his criticism of this mono-dimensional or single-sided view starting in the very first note of Notebook 13, which draws attention to the notion of planned activity around a party program or platform as the very subject matter of political life, in explicit contrast to both Sorel and Croce. In Sorel, the solution of the opposition between direct participation and planning is left entirely to spontaneity, to a Bergsonian *élan vitale*. In Croce, it is simply deemed impossible, hence his notion of 'party as prejudice' (13§1: QC, 1557). But how could a collective will be held together only by myth or struggle? In the long run a program and a positive and constructive, rather than merely oppositional, stance are indispensable to hold together a multitude of individual 'wills'.

It is against Croce's conception of politics as passion that Gramsci emphasizes the view of the party as a permanent political organization. What is at stake here is the very conception of politics as the permanent or stable activity of collective subjects stemming from a collective will. Gramsci insists, in fact, that permanent political parties have always existed, and so have armies (10ii§41v: QC, 1309). The point is taken up in Notebook 13. It is indeed central to this notebook, again with reference to Croce. His conception of politics as passion excludes political parties understood as permanent organizations capable of deliberate action, Gramsci objects, yet parties exist and they show that deliberate concerted action is possible. So too do standing armies, military academies and officer corps (13§8: QC, 1567), which in Gramsci's argument are important essentially as notable instances of collective subjects. The destruction of an army, he observes in another note, consists in severing the ties that make it into an 'organic mass' (13§35). If anything is in need of explanation, then, it is Croce's own peculiar conception of politics. In two notes titled 'Points for an essay on Croce. Passion and politics', Gramsci speculates that Croce's own political

activity may have inspired his conception, his particular view of politics (10ii§56; 10ii§58). Indeed the whole of Croce's own political activity had taken place outside of, or even against, organized politics, taking shape chiefly as ideological direction for cultural movements (10ii§59i).

Gramsci is in agreement with Michels and Weber in his insistence on the importance of organization in political life and so he is, too, on the dangers that this poses. He does not systematically distinguish between organization and bureaucratization nor, most importantly, between routinization and bureaucratization, as Weber does, on the contrary. However, all these concepts are present in Gramsci too, though not in Croce and Sorel. In a note discussing how parties react to crises, for example, Gramsci emphasizes the capacity of a party to react against the 'force of habit [*spirito di consuetudine*]', or routinization, as 'one of the most important questions concerning the political party' (13§23: QC, 1604). As he further analyzes this problem he approximates Michels' analysis of the problem posed by the internal organization or bureaucratization of a party. For Gramsci, in fact, the bureaucracy and high echelons of a party constitute the most dangerous force in this respect. If ties of solidarity form within this block so that it is severed from the mass of party members, the party itself risks becoming fossilized and anachronistic, all the more incapable of reacting to crises and implementing important change (QC, 1604). More in general, the development of professional bureaucracies in all fields has a fundamental meaning for political science, and it concerns both political parties and the state. Whether this general trend towards bureaucratization constitutes a degeneration or a needed and beneficial development has to be assessed from case to case, since each and every social or state form has its own way of setting up and addressing the problem of professional functionaries (13§36: QC, 1632).

Gramsci does not share, however, Weber's and Michels' pessimism about the inevitable onset and unstoppable progress of bureaucratization in the modern world. He in fact envisages an important counter-trend to bureaucratization in the form of the development of civil society. For one thing, Gramsci was well aware that different parties representing the same social bloc or social force could co-

exist. He was particularly interested in the ease with which the parties representing a particular social force could form a coherent group when faced with threats to their interests (13§23: QC, 1604). But the existence of a plurality of parties representing a single social bloc also points, if only implicitly, to the possibility that, if a party becomes unresponsive to the demands of a social force and too focused on the interests of its elite and bureaucratic elements, it will be left behind by other parties that compete with it. More in general, as evinced by a note specifically addressing Michels' approach to the study of parties, Gramsci rejects the focus on internal party dynamics. The study of a party, he proposes, ought to include the whole complex of social relations in which it participates (13§33). And the context or background against which to study this complex of social relations is provided by civil society and its expansion in modern times. The metaphor of modern politics as a war of position is indeed predicated on the notion of a massive development of civil society and its institutions. The degeneration of democratic regimes, Gramsci points out, has to be sought in civil society, in the proliferation of parties and the mushrooming of political divisions impeding the formation of agreement on political platforms (15§47), not just, or even not so much, in dynamics that are internal to parties. The latter remain indispensable to democracy precisely in aiding the formation of agreement on political platforms, which cannot be produced bureaucratically. Referring to Weber's study of party politics in Germany, Gramsci concurs on the importance of a whole parliamentary political tradition, as well as party political life, for the functioning of parliamentary regimes (15§48).

Pessimism regarding bureaucratization is further tempered, in Gramsci's view, by competition of bureaucratization with other, alternative, organizational forms. Not only does he suggest that each type of organization has its own problems and hence, presumably, that it has to be assessed relative to them (13§36: QC, 1632). But, most importantly, Gramsci distinguishes between two altogether different organizational forms that he refers to as 'bureaucratic centralism' and 'democratic centralism' (QC, 1632-5), implying that democratic centralism is superior, more flexible and adaptable (QC, 1635). The distinction

between the two, and the superiority of the second, is illustrated by Gramsci with reference to the Jutland battle in the First World War. Contrary to national stereotypes, he observes, the British naval command had tightly centralized its forces, while the German command had explained the battle plan to all units and left them free to respond to tactical developments (13§38: QC, 1650-1). The German approach is an instance of 'democratic centralism' understood as devolution of control and responsibilization of intermediate cadres. Its superiority is illustrated by the success of the German fleet in avoiding blunders, especially given the superiority of the British fleet, as well as by the grave danger faced by the British fleet when the command lost contact with its units (QC, 1651). As far as the discussion of bureaucratization in political life is concerned, therefore, it is not inevitable that bureaucratic centralization will triumph, but one has to differentiate among cases and find for each the required solution. It is indeed possible that at least in some circumstances democratic centralism will prevail.

6.5 – The Critique of Croce and The Machiavellians II: Elites

In his treatment of elites, as much as in his treatment of bureaucratization, Gramsci deviates from the 'Machiavellians', or elite theorists, in a number of important respects. Mosca and to some extent Pareto are most relevant here. Mosca and Pareto were indeed the chief theorists of elite rule. Gramsci differed from them in a number of important ways. He might well share with Mosca a realist theory of democracy, but in Gramsci's work this is combined with a search for the conditions under which elite rule is limited and compatible with the development of democracy, so that his position can be seen as a constructive criticism of Mosca's positions (Burgio 2010, 136, 148). In addition to these differences one ought to take into consideration that Gramsci's discussion of elites engages Croce's conception of ethico-political history, incorporating in a subordinate role Mosca's theory while rejecting its elitist aspect. For Gramsci, it was Croce who had put forward the question of great personalities in history and this, rather than Mosca's and Pareto's theories, features as the *main* target of Gramsci's criticism. Ethico-political history, he explains at the beginning of Notebook 10, the notebook on Croce's philosophy, is really the 'moment of

hegemony', which includes the role of culture and great personalities in history, while not being limited to it (10i§7: QC, 1223). By contrast, Croce's conception of politics as passion reduces the political act to the activity of party leaders and their followers (10ii§41v: QC, 1309). Gramsci is squarely against this reductionist view of political activity, as implicit also in his critique of Michels above, that the history of a party cannot be reduced to that of its internal components, chiefly its elite. Most importantly, there are both methodological and substantive points on which Gramsci further deviates from Croce's and the 'Machiavellians'' theories of elite rule. Here it is important to consider first the methodological and then the substantive points over which Gramsci diverged from Croce and the 'Machiavellians'.

The important methodological difference relates to the very conception of political science, which for Gramsci was to be understood historically. In particular, Gramsci criticizes the Crocean interpretation of Machiavelli as a theorist of political science for all times and places, which failed to see that the Florentine was a theorist of the unitary territorial state as it was developing in France and Spain (13§13: QC, 1572) and whose metaphor of the centaur represented in essence the double perspective of human politics, which was seen as involving aspects 'of force and consent, of authority and hegemony, of violence and civilization' (13§14: QC, 1576). The criticism was also implicitly aimed at Mosca, who had taken Machiavelli as the precursor of his a-historical political science (Fiorillo 2008, 848, 857-8). The difference here stems from Gramsci's fundamentally historical view of human nature: because there is no such thing as an abstract, ahistorical human nature, so there cannot be a science of politics good for all times and all places. Indeed for Gramsci 'the fundamental innovation introduced by the philosophy of praxis in the science of politics and history is the demonstration that there is no such thing as an abstract, fixed and immutable "human nature"', so that 'political science in its concrete content (and also in its logical formulation) must be conceived of as a developing organism' (13§20: QC, 1598-9), as a whole that develops through history with the development of the concrete social forms that it studies.

These views on politics and human nature have repercussions for Gramsci's understanding of the very notion of elite. Not only does Gramsci chide Mosca's approach as wanting in method, in rigor and coherence: 'The question of the political class, as presented by Mosca, has become a puzzle. One cannot exactly understand what Mosca means by political class, so much this notion is elastic and fluctuating' in his writings. Sometimes it seems to refer to the 'middle class,' other times to the ensemble of property owners, other times yet to the 'cultured part' of society or yet again to the 'political personnel' of the state, including parliamentarians (13§6). But Gramsci also deviates from the very view that elites are a necessary and unchanging part of human history. He certainly departs from Pareto's notion of the elite as based on a differential natural endowment. There is one note in which the division between elites and masses, leaders and led, is presented as a fundamental datum for political science (15§4). And much can be made of it as a point of convergence of Gramsci's and Mosca's theories (Finocchiaro 1999, 84-9, 99-107; Femia 1998, 53). In fact, however, Gramsci saw the distinction exclusively as related to questions of organization or organizational needs and emphasizes that the mass can give rise to its own organization, through the creation of organizing elements (14§70: QC, 1733-4). Lastly, both Gramsci and Croce share with Mosca the view that the rule of elites over popular masses constitutes a central political question (Zarone 1990). But in Croce (and arguably in Gramsci too, although with some important differences) the source of elite power, stemming from their intellectual and moral standing in society, is also inextricably bound to their positive role vis-à-vis the masses, which in Croce's case involves moderation and in Gramsci's case involves emancipation. Indeed Gramsci characterizes the establishment of a new hegemony with a marked anti-elitist tinge, as a struggle 'to make the ruled intellectually independent of the rulers, to destroy one hegemony and create another one' (10ii§41xii: QC, 1319).

The difference becomes starker when it comes to substantive points, all of which have important repercussions for the way in which Gramsci conceives of politics. Four such inter-related points mark Gramsci's theory apart from Croce's,

including his ethico-political history, and also from Mosca's elite theory, if only indirectly, since Gramsci did not address his work in the same depth. In the first place, Gramsci considers elites only in relation to the masses. The focus of his concern is always on the complementary relations of elites *and* masses. For Gramsci, in fact, the elite in and of itself does not constitute a formidable force. He seems to be uninterested in, if not to dismiss altogether, the question of the 'organizational outflanking' of masses by elites that can be seen to derive from Mosca's theory (Mann 1986, 7; 1993, 515-23, 540). Gramsci studies elites as leaders of masses. They draw their force not just, or even not so much, from their small numbers and high level of internal organization and co-ordination, but also, and crucially, from their ability to lead large groups. The latter are as important as the elite element itself in building power in the modern world. Power, Gramsci's argument implies, does not lay just in the organizational efficiency of small groups, but in the combination of this efficiency with the strength of the masses. It is the organizational effect of the elite vis-à-vis the masses, not vis-à-vis the elite itself, that is crucial. This approach is implied already in the essay on the Southern Question and it is developed in the notes on the Risorgimento, where Gramsci critiques the function played by intellectual figures such as Croce and Fortunato: their hegemonic function consisted only in drawing southern intellectuals away from the masses, leaving both groups, intellectuals and masses, weakened. At the same time, they themselves, especially Croce, had failed 'to go to the masses'. They had failed to appeal to the masses and to mobilize them. Hence the impotence of liberal elites against fascism. It was only a 'minimal' hegemony that Croce and Fortunato had helped to maintain.

Gramsci makes the same point in a number of different contexts. Before prison, Gramsci had fought against Bordiga's leadership and his vision of the 'vanguard party' as a small, conspiratorial and elite organization only, arguing for a mass party instead. In fact, all of Gramsci's work as an activist and organizer aimed at the build-up of organizational resources and alliances in order to foster the creation of a truly mass party that combined Leninist prescriptions with the Italian experience (Lussana 2008, 886-8, 895). Gramsci's theoretical stance is

developed in the *Prison Notebooks*, where he highlights the difference between 'small groups' and *true* 'vanguards' which are followed and backed up by a whole army, rejecting any voluntarism or elitism that simply wants to perpetuate itself rather than transforming itself into a veritable social force (8§244; 14§19). He similarly highlights the difference between isolated volunteers and an elite that is the expression of a mass (13§29: QC, 1623). Finally, his interest in '*organica*' or the military science of manning, with its prescribed proportions or ratios between officers, non-commissioned officers, troops, different specialties, etc., for all its emphasis upon the needed quality of the elite (13§31: QC, 1627), also belies the assumption that both officers and troops, both elites and masses, are needed to create an effective, coherent and cohesive force capable of acting in concert. In this conception the elite or professionals function as the stays and struts that turn an otherwise amorphous mass into an effective force. They do not create the force out of nothing, but out of the masses that sustain them in party activities or in elections, for example.

The second substantive point concerns the interaction between elite and masses in the process of achievement of self-consciousness by a group as understood by Gramsci. This is a fundamentally democratic process as it does not operate simply in one direction, from elite to masses. On the contrary, it is characterized by a lengthy interaction between intellectuals and masses that Gramsci calls the 'dialectic intellectuals-masses' (11§12: QC, 1386). This is a reciprocal relation of mutual influence based on the same principles as the modern pedagogic relation:

> the pedagogic relation cannot be limited to specifically "educational" relations, whereby the new generation comes into contact with the older ones, absorbing their experience and historically necessary values and [thus] "maturing" and developing a culturally and historically superior personality of its own. This relation exists in the society as a whole and for each individual with respect to other individuals, between intellectual and non-intellectual groups, between rulers and ruled, between elites and followers, between leaders and led, between vanguards and army corps. (10ii§44: QC, 1331)

In this relation, individual intellectuals and intellectual groups, the elite, are affected by the environment in which they operate as much as they affect it, and

in modern societies this mutual inter-relation is assured by the fundamental freedoms of thought and expression:

> the historical personality of an individual philosopher is also given by the active relation between [them] and the environment that they want to modify, an environment which reacts upon the philosopher and, forcing [them] to a continual [work of] self-critique, functions as "educator" [*maestro*]. So it happened that one of the major demands [*rivendicazioni*] of modern intellectual groups in the political field has been the one for the so-called "freedom of thought and expression (print and association)" because only where this political condition exists the relation educator-disciple in the above-mentioned sense is realized and in reality a new type of philosopher comes into being, who can be called "democratic philosopher," that is a philosopher convinced that their personality is not limited to their physical person, but is an active social relation [involving] modification of the cultural environment. When the "thinker" is satisfied with their own thought, "subjectively" free, that is abstractly free, [they] raise a laughter these days: the unity of life and science is precisely an active unity, in which alone freedom of thought is realized, it is an educator-pupil relation, [or] philosopher-cultural environment in which they operate, [and] from which to draw the problems that [it is] necessary to raise and solve, that is, the history-philosophy relation. (10ii§44: QC, 1331-2)

Ultimately, therefore, the intellectual leadership exercised by (some) modern elites cannot and does not in fact preclude (in the long run) taking into account the real needs and aspirations of the population, of the social and cultural environment in which they live and operate. On the contrary, continued acceptance of their leadership is predicated upon continued responsiveness of the intellectual elite to the needs of the masses.

The third point concerns the importance of competition among several elites and associated groups for mass support. Such competition can function as a means of democratic concessions, that is, to push for the transformation of original demands into universal, or at least more broad-based, ones. The very construction of a new hegemony by a soon-to-be dominant group involves both the development of productive forces from which the whole of society can benefit and also, most importantly, the granting of concessions to subaltern groups. The source for this specific aspect of Gramsci's understanding of hegemony could have been the Leninist concept of hegemony as endorsed by the Comintern. This included, besides an emphasis on alliance between workers and the peasantry, also a more general emphasis on the need for the working class to move beyond its economic-corporative interests, in favor of alliance building within a broader

social bloc and compromise concessions towards other groups in this bloc (Di Biagio 2008, 391-2, 396-400; Vacca 2008, 80-5). This is a departure from the Marxian notion of the proletariat as universal class because its woes are universal. Rather, universal demands are made and met in the construction of historical blocs of social forces, out of the very struggle that gives rise to the establishment of new hegemonies.

Gramsci gives as a concrete historical example of this process the rise to power of the Jacobins during the French revolution as radical representatives of the third estate and those who realized its hegemony over French society. All three above points are tightly interwoven in this account: (a) the importance of elites for giving coherence and unity to a large group and also for leading this group into taking the political initiative; (b) the importance of being able to talk to the masses and obtaining popular consent, or the 'dialectic intellectuals-masses'; and, finally, (c) the importance of competition among elites for making actual concessions. Gramsci's interpretation of events in the French revolution starts from the observation that initially the third estate was the least homogeneous of the estates, with 'a disparate intellectual elite and a very advanced economic group that was [however] politically moderate;' the representatives of the third estate were initially moderates too, who only 'raised questions that concerned the [actual,] physical components of the social group, and [furthermore, only concerned their] immediate "corporative" interests (corporative in the traditional sense of immediate and narrow-mindedly egoistic [as concerning only] a determinate category)' (19§24: QC, 2027). However, little by little, a 'new elite' was selected under pressure from the resistance of traditional social forces and from the international threat to early revolutionary accomplishments. This elite 'does not interest itself uniquely in "corporative" reforms but tends to conceive of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic group of *all popular forces* and this selection happens under pressure from two factors: *the resistance of old social forces and the international threat*.' (QC, 2028, my emphases). The leadership of bourgeois forces faced in fact two fundamental requirements:

> The first requirement was *to destroy enemy forces or at least to reduce them to impotence* so as to render a counter-revolution impossible; the second requirement was to enlarge the cadres of the bourgeoisie as such and to put it at the head of all national forces, identifying the interests and the common requirements of all national forces, to set these forces in motion and lead them into the fray, [thus] obtaining two results: a) opposing a larger target to the strikes by opponents, that is to create a politico-military relation [or ratio] favorable to the revolution; b) *to deprive opponents of any passive areas where it would be possible to raise vandean armies*. (QC, 2029, my emphases)

The Jacobins, Gramsci emphasizes, 'were realists à-la Machiavelli.' This for Gramsci means two things. Firstly, 'they were persuaded of the absolute truth of the formulas on equality, fraternity and liberty and, what matters most, the great popular masses that the Jacobins stirred up and led to the struggle were convinced of this truth also.' Secondly, 'the language of the Jacobins, their ideology, their methods of action [all] perfectly reflected the requirements of the epoch.' (QC, 2028) Thus the transition was accomplished from the specific demands of one group to pursue its socio-economic interests to the universal demands for freedom, equality and fraternity.

The fourth substantive point concerns the very status of the elite/mass distinction. The stance adopted by Croce and by elite theorists like Mosca is for Gramsci an essentially reactionary stance that tends to preserve the status quo. It tends to present the existing state of affairs as part of a natural and inescapable order. Gramsci's own stance could not be further from theirs and it is essentially about change. It is outlined in a note on political realism where Gramsci observes that '"too much" (and hence superficial and mechanical) political realism often leads to asserting that the statesman should only operate within the sphere of "effective reality," without taking an interest in [what] "ought to be" but only in [what] "is." This,' Gramsci adds ironically, 'would mean that the statesman should not have perspectives [stretching] beyond the length of his nose.' (13§16: QC, 1577) The observation is made in the context of a reflection on the figures of Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini. Gramsci unfavorably contrasts 'Guicciardini's man' to 'Machiavelli's man', as two paradigms respectively representing the careful diplomat epitomizing the conservative ethos of traditional Italian elites (Guicciardini), as opposed to the passionate popular democrat

appealing for mass support (Machiavelli). In reply to the suggestion that Guicciardini represents the 'true political man' or true statesman Gramsci insists that it is necessary to differentiate the latter from a diplomat. 'The diplomat cannot but move only within effective reality, because his specific activity is not to create new equilibria, but to preserve within certain juridical frameworks the existing equilibria.' (QC, 1577) So too do political scientists when acting as mere scientists. But here Gramsci introduces another, implicit, differentiation between a scientist acting 'as mere scientist' and Machiavelli, whom Gramsci takes as a paradigm of a political scientist *and* a passionate and involved political man, not content with the existing state of affairs but striving to change it (QC 1577-8). A similar point is made for Sorel (10ii§41v: QC, 1308-9). This marks a profound contrast with the notion of political science that Gramsci imputed to Mosca when describing his work, specifically the *Elements of Political Science*, as a 'huge miscellany … sociological and positivistic in character' (8§24: PN, 252).

6.6 – Relations of Force I: The Definition

Gramsci arrived at a definition of political science from his critique and fundamental re-elaboration of Croce's and the Machiavellians' theories. In the course of this critical engagement he defined political science as the study of the balance of power between different permanently organized forces. This study of the balance of power was variously called by Gramsci an analysis of 'relations [or ratios] of force' [*rapporti di forza*] or 'relation of forces' [*rapporto di forze*]. It was understood as a theory of the balance of power among competing collective subjects characterized by various degrees of internal organization and various degrees of self-consciousness and awareness of tasks. Indeed for Gramsci a key task for political science is the analysis of the social forces facing each other at any one time (Frosini 2010, 196, 203). Defining a proper conceptual framework for the study of relations of force was an integral part of this definition. The importance of a suitable conceptual framework is set out as a goal already at the beginning of Notebook 13 (13§2: QC, 1561) and highlighted in contrast to Mosca's work. The material that is piled up chaotically in the *Elements of Political Science*, Gramsci observes, can and ought to be systematically ordered

(QC, 1562), hence the importance of an overall, systematic framework, that is just barely sketched out in this note. The framework for political science as an analysis of relations of force is laid out quite clearly in a later, lengthy note titled 'Analysis of situations: relations of force' (13§17), although important elements of it are introduced and explained already in the note on 'excessive realism' and Machiavelli that immediately precedes it (13§16), as well as in previous notes on Croce and Machiavelli (13§10 and 13§2). Here it is important to consider first the very definition of the study of the balance of power or 'relation/s of force/s', which was set out by Gramsci in two contexts: vis-à-vis the concept of political realism and vis-à-vis the concept of organization.

Not surprisingly, the expression 'relations of force' or balance of power emerges first in Notebook 13 within the context of the discussion of political realism. Only Gramsci applies this concept not to the balance of power among different states in a state system, but to different political forces within a given state. This is already clear within the note on 'excessive realism' and Machiavelli that we have just seen. Here Gramsci defines 'effective reality' not statically but dynamically, as a changing balance of power among different forces. He thus effectively introduces the notion that political science involves the study of forces and their relations, including equilibria, with a view to changing them. In a manner that parallels Marx's dictum that 'men make their own history, but not as they please, not in circumstances of their own choosing,' Gramsci asserts that 'the active politician is a creator, a rouser, but he neither creates out of nothing nor moves in the cloudy emptiness of his desires and dreams. He bases himself on effective reality, but what is this effective reality?' (13§16: QC, 1578) Gramsci explains that this involves an essentially dynamic view of equilibria, as opposed to a static one. He asks of reality: 'Is it something static and unmoving or [is it] not rather *a relation of forces in continuous movement and changing equilibrium*? Applying the will to the creation of a new *equilibrium of the really existing and operative forces*, basing oneself on the determinate force that one deems progressive, and strengthening it to make it triumph is still to move on the terrain of effective reality but to dominate it and surpass it (or to contribute to this).' (QC,

1578, my emphases) This was the purpose that animated Machiavelli and his notion of 'what ought to be' which remained fundamentally realistic 'even though it did not become immediate reality, because one cannot expect an individual or a book to change reality but only to interpret it and indicate possible lines of action.' (QC, 1578)

There is an implicit criticism of Croce's work in this last passage, since for Gramsci Croce's histories were just histories of his own thought. But the most important point in this passage concerns the very definition of political science. This is the analysis of relations of force, indicating 'possible lines of action' for concrete historical forces. And among the 'possible lines of action' it seeks to point to the most efficient. It is, in a sense, a collective ergonomics, an ergonomics of social life, in the sense that it indicates not just what is possible, but how to achieve it most efficiently. Machiavelli remained a realist while undertaking precisely this kind of study. 'Machiavelli never says that he thinks or submits that he can change reality himself, but only and concretely that [he] shows how historical forces should have operated to be efficient.' (QC, 1578) This point is reiterated in the following note (13§17), the last paragraph of which explains its rationale. 'The most important observation to be made concerning any concrete analysis of relations of force is the following: that these analyses cannot be an end in themselves (unless one was writing a chapter in past history) but they acquire significance only if they serve to justify a practical activity, an initiative of the will.' (QC, 1588)

A definition of force as a permanently organized collective subject is implicit in Gramsci's definition of the 'relations of force' as a dynamic equilibrium within the context of his discussion of political realism. This definition is made explicit in the last note. Gramsci draws attention here to the two crucial aspects of relations of force. One concerns the level of organization and purposefulness of forces in the field, their ability to move coherently and intentionally in the pursuit of a goal. What is at stake here is the very definition of 'force,' which means, quite clearly and explicitly, an organized collective subject. Gramsci illustrates this point too with a military metaphor and example:

> *The decisive element in each situation is the permanently organized and long predisposed force* that can be made to advance when a situation is deemed favorable (and it is favorable only in that such a force exists and is full of fighting spirit); therefore *the essential task is to systematically and patiently attend to forming, developing, [and] rendering ever more homogeneous, compact and conscious of itself this [very] force*. This can be seen in military history and in the care with which in any historical period armies have been predisposed to start a war at any time. Great States have been great States precisely because they were prepared at any time to insert themselves effectively into favorable international conjunctures and these were such because there was the concrete possibility of inserting [oneself] effectively into them. (QC, 1588-9, my emphases)

The other aspect that Gramsci draws attention to concerns the conjuncture itself. In fact, if for Gramsci the first and most basic prerequisite of each situation is the actual existence of an effectively organized force, he does not exclude that the situation itself, that is the existence of several such forces and the consequent relations of force between them, is also centrally important and an integral part of political science. Concrete analyses of situations in which several forces are involved, then, 'show which are the points of least resistance, where the force of will [or willpower] can be applied most fruitfully, they suggest the immediate tactical operations, they indicate how best to set up a political agitation campaign, what language will be best understood by the multitude etc.' (QC, 1588)

6.7 – Relations of Force II: The Framework of Economy and Politics

A proper conceptual framework for the study of relations of force was needed to systematize the study of politics, that is, to order systematically the observations made by political scientists. This framework, as provided by Gramsci, also articulated the relationship between economy and politics. In Gramsci's language this was the relationship between socio-economic groups and organized collective subjects that could be seen as possessing a collective will. At bottom, this was the classical Marxian problem of the relationship between the economic construct of class-in-itself to the political construct of class-for-itself. Gramsci's discussion contributes to this classical problem its emphasis upon organization as the fundamental, defining aspect of the political. Thus the question of the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself in Gramsci's framework becomes the question of the transition from the economic sphere – in which individuals are simply a mass of separate individuals – to the political sphere, or the sphere of

civil society and the state – in which individuals are organized in associations, unions, parties and the state itself. There is another interesting aspect about Gramsci's formulation of the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself. He borrowed from Croce the language of 'distinctions' or 'moments' of the (human) Spirit for his framework depicting the interaction between economy and politics in the analysis of 'relations of force'. As appropriated by Gramsci, this meant that the framework divided the analysis into different phases or moments in the formation of collective subjects out of the disorganized masses of individuals in socio-economic groups. Here it is important to consider first Gramsci's formulation of political analysis in terms of the Crocean distinctions or moments of the Spirit and then see how he described the passage from economy to politics.

The overall framework within which to carry out an analysis of relations of force is defined by Gramsci vis-à-vis Croce. The analysis of relations of force and the situations which they constitute and in which they present themselves, is in fact expressed in terms of the Crocean language of 'moments' or 'distinctions of the spirit.' This is set out explicitly as a framework in the earlier note on Croce and Machiavelli:

> *The initial question to pose and resolve in a treatment of Machiavelli is the question of politics as an autonomous science, that is of the place that politics occupies or should occupy in a systematic (coherent and consistent) conception of the world – in a philosophy of praxis.* The progress imparted by Croce, concerning this [question], to the studies on Machiavelli and political science, consists chiefly (as in other fields of Crocean critical activity) in the dissolution of a series of false, non-existent or badly set up problems. Croce based himself on his distinction between moments of the Spirit and on the assertion of a practical moment, autonomous and independent, although circularly linked to the whole of reality by the dialectic of distinctions. In a philosophy of praxis the distinction certainly will not be between the moments of the absolute Spirit, but between the levels [or phases] of the superstructure and it [(the task)] will thus be about *establishing the dialectical position of political activity (and the corresponding science) as a determinate superstructural level*: one could say, as a first mention and [as an] approximation, that political activity is precisely the first moment or level, the moment in which the superstructure is still in the immediate phase of a voluntary, indistinct and elementary, mere assertion. (13§10: QC, 1568-9, my emphases)

Here Gramsci is saying that politics begins at the first and most basic level of the superstructures, but in the same note he goes on to suggest a very wide expansion of the place of politics. The very dense and short paragraph that follows reads

more like a memo than anything else, but still gives an indication of the questions that Gramsci thought important to address.

> In what sense politics can be identified with history and therefore the whole of life with politics. How thus the whole system of superstructures can be conceived as distinctions of politics and therefore [how] one could justify the introduction of the concept of distinction in a philosophy of praxis. But can one talk of a dialectic of distinctions and how can one understand the concept of circle [or circular link] among the levels of the superstructure? Concept of "historical bloc," that is unity between nature and spirit (structure and superstructure) a unity of opposites and distinctions (QC, 1569)

Thus Gramsci suggests that all the superstructures, or superstructural distinctions, are concerned with collective subjects and their relations of force in various states of dynamic equilibrium. This point is reiterated in the note which details the overall framework as a Marxian re-interpretation of Croce's dialectic of distinctions. Here Gramsci suggests a distinction between three different 'moments' or 'degrees' of 'relations of force' corresponding to various structural and superstructural levels. These are: 1) socio-economic forces; 2) political forces; 3) military forces.

The first 'moment' concerns the relation between socio-economic forces. It is most closely tied to the existing development of the economic structure and concerns class as an economic category, that is, simply as class-in-itself. It is the subject matter of economics and economic history.

> 1) A relation of social forces that is closely tied to the structure, [that is] objective, independent of the will of men, [and] which can be measured with the systems of the exact or physical sciences. On the basis of the degree of development of the material forces of production one has [various] social groupings, each of which represents a function and has a given position in production itself. This relation is what it is, it constitutes an unwieldy reality: nobody can modify the number of firms and the number of personnel [in this sector], the number of cities with the given urban population etc. (13§17: QC, 1583)

The fundamental reality confronting men is thus constituted by the structure of society and the relations of social forces associated with a given development of the economic structure. In other words, class divisions broadly defined still play a fundamental role in Gramsci's framework for the study of politics. This emerges also in his discussion of the relationship between political parties and class and,

most importantly, in his assertion that the fundamental tie uniting social groups cannot be *only* juridical-political, but draws its origins from relations of production (13§35).

The other two 'moments' correspond to the superstructures and are the subject matter of political science. They involve the progressive transformation of class-in-itself into class-for-itself, as the socio-economic group goes first through an economic-corporative phase to arrive (potentially) at an hegemonic phase. The second 'moment' concerns the relation between political forces. It directly builds on the fundamental divisions determined by the previous moment, but it adds the all-important components of organizational and cultural or ideological unity that are at the very heart of politics.

> 2) A successive moment is the relation of political forces, that is the evaluation of *the degree of homogeneity, of self-consciousness and of organization achieved* by the various social groups. This moment can be analyzed in its turn and differentiated into various levels [or stages], which correspond to the different moments of the collective political conscience, as they have manifested themselves in history until now. (13§17: QC 1583, my emphasis)

Within this second 'moment,' then, Gramsci further distinguishes between three different moments or stages. These roughly correspond to different stages of organization and alliance building by a group. They are: (i) the economic-corporative moment; (ii) a first political moment; and (iii) a second political moment. The latter is also the 'moment of hegemony,' the phase in which the self-consciousness and awareness of historical potential by a group have reached a point that transcends its own immediate interests and allows it to become the engine of a general historical development, including universal claims that fulfill the aspirations of other, subaltern, groups.

> [i] The first and more elementary [moment] is the economic-corporative one: a trader [*commerciante*] feels they have to be in solidarity with another trader, an industrialist [*fabbricante*] with another industrialist, etc., but the trader does not feel that they have to be in solidarity with the industrialist; that is, the homogeneous unity, and the duty to organize it, is felt for the [immediate] professional group, but not yet for the broader social group. (QC, 1583-4)

The next moment involves a move beyond the immediate economic-corporative interests of a social group.

> [ii] A second moment is that in which the consciousness of solidarity of interests among all members of the social group is achieved, but still [only] in the merely economic field. Already in this moment the question of the state is raised, but only on the terrain in which to achieve a politico-juridical equality with the dominant social groups, because the right is claimed to participate in legislation and in administration and even perhaps to modify [laws and administrative procedures], but only within the existing fundamental schemas. (QC, 1584)

The third, or hegemonic, moment involves the passage to leadership in articulating and implementing the interests of an entire social bloc.

> [iii] A third moment is that in which the consciousness is achieved that one's corporative interests, in their current and future development, go beyond corporative circles, [beyond] the merely economic group, and can and must become the interests of other[,] subaltern groups. This is the most truly political phase, which marks the clear-cut transition from the structure to the complex superstructures, it is the phase in which the ideologies that previously germinated become a "party," they confront [each other] and struggle [with each other] until only one of them, or only one combination of them, tends to prevail, to impose itself, diffusing itself in the whole social bloc [*area sociale*], determining, besides the uniqueness of [adopted] economic and political ends, also the moral and intellectual unity, posing all the questions over which struggle takes place not on a corporative plane, but on a "universal" plane, thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate social groups. (QC, 1584)

Note the importance that alliance-building has in this moment, in which questions are posed 'not on a corporative plane,' that is, on the plane of the immediate interests that directly affect one economic category, 'but on a "universal" plane.' Gramsci goes on to extend this discussion to the state and how it is perceived and used in this hegemonic phase. He thus provides a concrete re-elaboration of the Hegelian view of the state as the locus of universal claims:

> The State is conceived indeed as the own organism of one group, destined to create the conditions favorable to the maximum [possible] expansion of the group itself, but this development and this expansion are conceived and presented as the motive force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the "national" energies, that is the dominant group is concretely coordinated with the general interests of the subordinate groups and state life is conceived as a continuous forming and overcoming of unstable equilibria (within the scope of the law) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of subordinate groups, equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail but only up to a certain point, that is, not until the petty economic-corporative interest. (QC, 1584)

Gramsci thus emphasizes that, in this hegemonic moment, it is both possible and necessary for the hegemonic group, the fundamental social group leading the

development of productive forces, to take into account the needs and interests of other, subaltern groups, incorporating them in its agenda. In this respect, Gramsci's conception of hegemony moves beyond the study of false consciousness, or hegemony as a technique of power. Rather, the hegemonic group that actually develops productive forces also develops social forces in general, certainly those that can benefit from the general expansion of the economy.

The third 'moment' in Gramsci's framework concerns the relations between military forces. It too is the subject matter of politics in so far as it addresses the origins and operations of collective subjects. Only, these subjects are those that develop the 'means of coercion', as modern sociology has dubbed them (Tilly 1990, 19).

> 3) The third moment is that of the relation of military forces, immediately decisive case by case. (Historical development continuously oscillates between the first and the third moment, with the mediation of the second). But it too is not something indistinct and immediately identifiable schematically. Within it too two levels [or stages] can be distinguished: the military one in a strict or technical-military sense and the level [or stage] that can be called politico-military (13§17: QC, 1585-6).

Gramsci illustrates the politico-military stage with reference to an hypothetical situation in which a state dominates a nation with aspirations to statehood. Gramsci draws in this case from nineteenth century European nationalisms and from the Risorgimento in particular. The domination, although immediately stemming from the balance of military forces, also typically relies on the balance of politico-military forces, as the oppressed nation is socially divided and the mass of its population is mostly passive. Struggles for independence begin with a change in this politico-military stage, as the oppressed nation does not wait until it has developed its own army, but opposes a politico-military mobilization to superior military means which it seeks to undermine by forcing them, for example, to spread thinly within a given territory, so that the military advantage of the oppressor is nullified (QC, 1586).

6.8 – Economic and Political Preconditions of Historical Development

The process of creation of a collective will and subject that is at the heart of the study of relations of force is indispensable to understand historical development. According to Gramsci, in fact, historical development could not occur without some form of human intervention, without an active will and a subject to implement (rational) change. Bukharin failed to understand this and thus produced a fundamentally flawed theory of history. The 'central problem of Marxism, how historical development arises on the basis of the structure', is clearly posed by Plekhanov, but not addressed by Bukharin. Gramsci frames this central problem with reference to two statements by Marx to the effect that (a) a society only addresses tasks for the solution of which the material premises already exist and (b) no society perishes until all developments of which the existing structure is capable have been exhausted (11§22: QC, 1422). These two statements concern the conditions for the appearance of the 'new' and the disappearance of the 'old' (Frosini 2010, 174, 190-1). They define what is necessary for historical development. What must be emphasized here is that, in thus framing necessity in historical development, Gramsci is not appealing to some kind of deterministic scheme. Rather, he defines an envelope, as it were, within which the rise and success of collective subjects is possible and, in its turn, makes (further) historical development possible. He goes on to explain, in fact, that within these two terms or limits one ought to address 'the problem of the formation of active political groups' (11§22: QC, 1422). This interpretation of Marx's statements also appears in another note, which similarly calls for the study of the formation of a permanent 'collective will' (8§195). And Marx's two statements or 'two principles' from the *Preface* are premised to the analysis of 'relations of force' in Notebook 13 (13§17). The upshot of this analysis is that, while the existence of socio-economic pre-conditions is a necessary but not sufficient condition for historical development, so too is the existence of political pre-conditions. Therefore *both economic and political pre-conditions have to be present* to lead to the creation of active political groups and to result in their *lasting* success, to

result in activity that establishes itself as lasting historical development. Thus Gramsci steers a middle ground between voluntarism and determinism.

For all his emphasis on the relative autonomy of politics and the importance of collective will, in fact, Gramsci is no mere voluntarist. On the contrary, he is a political realist also in the sense that he deems one ought to assess political activity by the objective limits of what can be achieved at any one time, given the existing balance of socio-economic forces, as well as the existing balance of political and military forces building upon these. In the note on 'excessive realism' and Machiavelli, for example, Gramsci also introduces the concept of necessity in relation to realism. 'It is a matter of seeing whether "what ought to be" is an arbitrary or necessary act, [whether] it is concrete will or foolish ambition, [mere] desire, daydream' (13§16: QC, 1577-8). The existing relations of force determine whether a certain activity is historically necessary or otherwise. In particular, political organization can fulfill the potential of socio-economic forces in its entirety or only partially. It cannot exceed that potential in bringing about lasting historical development. This point emerges most clearly in Gramsci's analysis of revolutions. The Jacobins 'imposed themselves' on existing bourgeois forces and led them to take a more advanced position than the one that these forces 'would have "spontaneously" wished to occupy and also more advanced than the historical premises should have allowed, hence the backlashes and the function of Napoleon I.' (19§24: QC, 2027) In other words, the conjunctural balance of political and military forces may enable some of these forces to push through momentous changes that far exceed what is historically necessary by the balance of socio-economic forces, but these changes will be all the more at risk of being overturned by reaction.

At the same time, for all his emphasis on the importance of the existing balance of socio-economic forces, Gramsci is no mere determinist either. In accordance with his observations regarding the autonomy of politics from economics, he emphasizes both that active political groups are necessary and that their formation is not an automatic development that simply follows from the appearance of suitable economic pre-conditions. In the note focusing on progress,

Gramsci explicitly states that the simple existence of 'objective conditions' is insufficient. It is necessary 'to know how to exploit them and to want to exploit them'. In other words, (collective) knowledge and will are an indispensable part of historical change (10ii§48ii: QC, 1338). Specifically organizational or political factors are indispensable, in addition to economic ones. Bukharin had failed to give a proper place to political science in his sociology, whereas it is essential to determine its place within the philosophy of praxis, since one cannot ignore the role of human will in historical development (15§10). Sometimes the automatism of certain premises, Gramsci observes, is not realized precisely because the organizational means such as parties or capable leadership are lacking (13§31: QC, 1627-8). Indeed we have seen that he thought the central task of politics to be 'to systematically and patiently attend to forming, developing, [and] rendering ever more homogeneous, compact and conscious of itself' a political force. A collective will, he makes clear in another note, does not arise spontaneously and mechanically, but has to be built slowly and laboriously (15§35: QC, 1789). Organizational work has to be done in order to turn amorphous masses of individuals, whose only tie to each other is to find themselves in the same economic position, into coherent and cohesive political groups. This quintessentially political work, and how best to apply it to change existing situations, is the subject matter of political science.

Conclusion

Political science for Gramsci is the study of organized collective subjects that can be seen as possessing a collective will. It studies the formation and characteristics of these subjects singularly taken, as well as the balance of power or 'relations of force' among several such subjects within a given society or state. Gramsci was no organicist, however, and his whole conception of collective subjects or corporate actors was founded upon organization. This marked the transition from the sphere of economic individualism to that of collective action by corporate actors or collective subjects. It must be noted that Gramsci's discussion of organization largely ignored institutions such as the firm, which remain economic in nature despite being bureaucratically organized internally, to concentrate

instead upon unions and parties. Possibly, had he dealt with such corporate actors as the firm, he would have approached them as the subject of political economy. Be that as it may, the transition from the economic-corporative moment to the hegemonic one, or to the moment of the state, involved also a transition from the sphere of immediate self-interest to that of ethical behavior. There are thus more aspects to the relationship between the economic and the political than merely organizational factors. Nevertheless the latter are crucially important to understand Gramsci's conception of political science, which Gramsci discusses precisely as the study of collective subjects possessed of a collective will. This discussion is important philologically, for the reconstruction of Gramsci's thought, since there is a whole notebook dedicated to Machiavelli and the foundations of political science. It is also important theoretically, for a full understanding of Gramsci's theory of politics, since this discussion arguably provides the groundwork upon which Gramsci's more famous elaboration of specific political concepts, such as civil society, the state and hegemony, takes place.

CONCLUSIONS

The central argument put forward by this thesis is that there is a fundamental unity and coherence to a central part of Gramsci's work that stemmed from his project for a reconstruction of Marxism. Marxism for Gramsci was to be reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis within which a special place was reserved for science and for social sciences such as economics and political science in particular. We have seen that to reconstruct Marxism as a philosophy of praxis meant to differentiate it from both idealism and materialism. Marxism was thus centrally concerned with human practical activity in history, rather than with pure ideas or material forces. Moreover, human practical activity was to be understood concretely rather than speculatively. For Gramsci this meant to start from the classical Marxian notion of praxis as productive activity, but to expand it by adding to it the experimental activity of scientists and political activity in organizing for collective pursuits, both of which came to exemplify human practical activity in his work. We have also seen that to make a place for economics and political science within Marxism reconstructed as a philosophy of praxis meant to differentiate these disciplines and to define their explanatory roles. It meant to lay the foundations for these disciplines within a reconstructed Marxism.

In retracing Gramsci's own reconstruction of Marxism this thesis contributes to five different areas of Gramscian scholarship and Marxian and sociological scholarship more generally. The first area consists in contemporary philological interpretations of Gramsci. As emphasized by these interpretations, philosophy played a central role in Gramsci's work. Here we have seen how it was central to his reconstruction of Marxism, since Gramsci sought to reconstruct it precisely as a philosophy or theory of history. We have also seen that two crucial concepts of this reconstruction of Marxism, to be added to the concept of immanence highlighted by contemporary philological interpretations, were the concepts of praxis and of human nature. Both were derived from Gramsci's

reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and both, but particularly human nature, showed a significant re-working on Gramsci's part. In this re-working Gramsci carved a place for the individual in the traditional Marxian definition of human nature as the 'ensemble of social relations'. This in its turn paved the way for Gramsci's use of methodological individualism – as in his advocacy of the concept of *homo oeconomicus* in economics – and of ontological individualism in the study of politics – as in his view that man was 'essentially political' and given to co-operative pursuits with other human beings. In fact, an integral part of Gramsci's reconstruction of Marxism as a philosophy was to lay the foundations for social sciences like economics and politics. There was thus a foundational aspect to Gramsci's exegetical interpretation of Marxism as arising out of the encounter between philosophy, economics and political science. It meant asking key philosophical or theoretical questions regarding the foundations of knowledge in social sciences like economics and political science. It meant asking what explanatory role these sciences would have in Marxism defined as a philosophy of praxis.

The second area of Gramscian scholarship that this thesis contributes to consists in established interpretations of Gramsci as a cultural and linguistic theorist. These have to be qualified in light of Gramsci's interest in philosophy and the foundations of social science in his reconstruction of Marxism. It is not only that Gramsci's conception of culture was closely linked to social structure, rather than being separate from it. When it came to the central task of the reconstruction of Marxism, Gramsci turned to philosophy and science, not to culture and linguistics. As far as philosophy is concerned, one might still recognize that Gramsci approached the study of philosophy as part of the study of culture. But, as we have seen, the study of philosophy stood apart from other aspects of culture both politically and theoretically. Politically, the greater internal coherence of philosophy meant that it played for Gramsci a key role in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies. Theoretically, the greater systematic character of philosophy meant that it played a key role in laying the foundations for other disciplines such as economics and political science. As far as science is

concerned, one might still recognize that Gramsci saw scientific objectivity as embroiled in cultural practices. But, as we have seen, his notion of objectivity in natural science was such that it transcended cultural differences. Overall, Gramsci's approach to science is best characterized as an effort to find a middle ground between science as infallible and science as little more than another cultural construct. He rejected both positivism and cultural relativism to propose a view of science as fallible but perfectible.

The third area of Gramscian scholarship that this thesis contributes to is in the history of social and political thought and consists in the relationship between Gramsci and the contemporary theorists that he addressed. Croce stands out among these. The relationship between Gramsci and the master of neoidealist philosophy in Italy sums up Gramsci's relationship to idealist thought in general. Gramsci set out while in prison to undertake a thorough settlement of accounts with his erstwhile philosophical conscience. Indeed he planned to write an Anti-Croce that would have taken distance from the most complete and successful form of Italian neoidealist philosophy. We have seen indeed that in most questions addressed here Gramsci diverged from Croce in significant ways, starting with his conception of philosophy in general and of praxis more in particular, which Gramsci sought to interpret concretely rather than speculatively, as he thought that Croce had done. He also diverged from Croce fundamentally in his treatment of science. Gramsci gave pride of place to experimental science, which Croce had thoroughly dismissed. He sought to lay the foundations for a science of economics that was partly empirical-inductive and partly axiomatic-deductive, unlike Croce, who insisted on a model of economics as axiomatic-deductive only that he drew from pure economics alone. Finally, Gramsci also gave far more importance to politics and political science, in which he recognized the importance of organizational issues. In this last respect Gramsci was closer to Mosca and Michels, among his contemporaries. But he also differed from them methodologically – in that he wanted to lay the foundations for a historically sensitive, or contextual, political science – as well as substantively – in that he

did not see bureaucratization or the rule of elites as inevitable phenomena in the modern world.

The fourth area of Gramscian scholarship that this thesis contributes to is also in the history of social and political thought and consists in the relationship between Gramsci and intellectual movements and debates that were his contemporaries. Gramsci's interest in the foundations of social sciences like economics meant that he shared a central concern with authors involved in the *methodenstreit*. In particular, he shared with Weber and with the Austrian school the effort to lay the foundations for the use of methodological individualism and of the axiomatic-deductive method in economics. Only, in Gramsci's case economics was conceived of as partly axiomatic-deductive and partly empirical-inductive. This last aspect was in accordance with the model of the new German historical school, but also with work by historical sociologists such as Weber. For Gramsci as for these scholars, in fact, the very existence of the laws that economics sought to deduce, as well as of the premises from which it sought to deduce them, had to be ascertained empirically, through historical work. But given these caveats, Gramsci remained committed to a science of economics as well as to a political science. The latter complemented economics by focusing on collective subjects rather than upon isolated individuals. Because of this commitment to science Gramsci also remained an exception within Western Marxism.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to a fifth area of scholarship, which consists in contemporary social theory that has sought to reconstruct Marxism, for example Analytical Marxism, as well as in that larger and expanding area of sociology that seeks to adapt and apply methodological individualism to the study of society. Gramsci's example is arguably relevant here as an instance of a circumscribed effort to integrate methodological individualism within social science. On the one hand, we have Gramsci's effort to integrate methodological individualism within economics and to define a relationship between 'thin' and 'thick' descriptions of individuals' behavior, which he saw not as alternative paradigms, but as complementary aspects of a definition of human nature that

encompassed one as a special case of the other. Gramsci argued that, within particular historical circumstances in which it could assume a specific institutional framework, economics can indeed derive laws starting only from the premises of individual behavior, from the behavior of a given *homo oeconomicus*. On the other hand, we have Gramsci's effort to integrate ontological individualism within political science, while remaining committed to the use of the notion of collective subject or corporate actor for the purposes of explanation. Indeed for Gramsci what was distinctive about political science was precisely its focus upon collective subjects, subjects in which individuals' behavior seemed to spring not from a multitude of individual 'wills' but, as it were, from a single collective will. This did not imply an organicist view of society, but rather a conception of organized collections of individuals with an internal hierarchy and roles or levels. Indeed, as appropriate for a political activist and party organizer, Gramsci gave pride of place to organizational considerations in his very formulation of the subject matter of political science. Finally, Gramsci arguably contributed also to contemporary political sociology, which has focused on the study of power as its subject matter, by proposing that a socially informed political science concerned itself not only with the study of individual collective subjects, but also with the balance of power or 'relations of force' among the multitude of collective subjects of civil society.

The picture of Gramsci that emerges from this thesis is perhaps closer to Analytical Marxism than to the contemporary cultural or linguistic turn. It is not that Gramsci devoted attention only to philosophy and science, but when he set out to reconstruct Marxism he turned to these disciplines rather than to cultural or linguistic studies. The task of the cultural critic, however, undoubtedly remained central to his other writings while in prison, which included notes on cultural and literary criticism, as well as on the analysis of culture. But perhaps in fact Gramsci straddles both camps: like his attempted synthesis of the artificially opposed sides within the *methodenstreit*, with the suggestion that economics was partly empirical-inductive and partly axiomatic-deductive, his work took cultural and linguistic studies into consideration, as well as more traditional disciplines like philosophy and science. What this thesis has done, then, is to add an essential

missing piece to the puzzle of the 'Gramsci *integrale*', that is, the complete picture of this complex and eclectic thinker. What remains to be done is to explore exactly in what ways Gramsci the analytical theorist, who turned to philosophy and science in reconstructing Marxism from the ground up, is combined with Gramsci the cultural critic, who devoted pages and pages to the critique of lesser intellectual figures who nevertheless had a large cultural impact, if only for being representative of certain common intellectual types, like father Bresciani or Loria. Indeed the most fruitful contribution by Gramsci to contemporary scholarship is arguably in the synthesis, within his own work, of the two seemingly incompatible approaches of Analytical Marxism and philosophy more in general and of the cultural and linguistic turn.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

This thesis is entirely based upon a close reading of the original, unabridged Italian edition of the prison notebooks by Valentino Gerratana. In providing quotes of the original text I have made use, besides the Italian original, only of the English translation of the Gerratana edition by Joseph Buttigieg.

Because this translation currently includes just the first eight notebooks, references in the text are to the Buttigieg edition for quotes from the first eight notebooks, and to the original Gerratana edition for subsequent notebooks. I have provided the translation for the Gerratana edition.

In providing my own translation I have sought to reach a balance between fluent rendition in English and faithfulness to the original Italian text. Whenever a word is added, the added English word is provided in square brackets. Similarly, whenever an English word differs significantly from the original Italian, becase of a choice in translation, the original word has nevertheless been provided in square brackets in order to warn the reader.

References to the original text adhere to the following format.

For all references I have provided the notebook number followed by the paragraph number, according to a numbering convention for notebooks and paragraphs or notes followed by both the Gerratana edition and the Buttigieg translation. **Thus (4§41) stands for paragraph or note 41 in Notebook 4 and (11§39) stands for paragraph or note 39 in Notebook 11.** This numbering allows the reader to find any note in either edition.

When providing actual quotes and not just references I have added the page number of the specific edition that I have used in providing the quote. For the

first eight notebooks, this is the Buttigieg translation, shortened as PN for *Prison Notebooks* and referring to the following volumes: Volume I (Gramsci 1992) for Notebooks 1-2; Volume II (Gramsci 1996) for Notebooks 3-5; Volume III (Gramsci 2007) for Notebooks 6-8. **Thus (4§41: PN, 189) refers to Notebook 4, paragraph 41 at page 189 of the second volume of the *Prison Notebooks*.**

For notebooks above 8, the reference is to the original Gerratana edition, shortened as QC for *Quaderni del Carcere*. This is a four volume edition with a single publication date and continuous page numbering (Gramsci 1977), shortened as QC for Quaderni del Carcere and containing the following notebooks: Volume I for Notebooks 1-5; Volume 2 for Notebooks 6-11; Volume 3 for Notebooks 12-29. The fourth volume contains footnotes only. **Thus (11§39: QC, 1458) refers to Notebook 11, paragraph 39 at page 1458 of the *Quaderni del Carcere*.** This happens to be the second volume, as identified by the page number.

Successive references to the same note refer only to the edition and page number.

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