

Introduction: Gramsci and “philosophy”

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1.

This number of the «International Gramsci Journal» consists of a monographic *dossier* devoted to *Gramsci and “philosophy”*. The inverted commas around the term *philosophy* signify a dual tendency apparent in Gramsci studies of the last twenty to twenty five years: on the one hand, there has been a return to studying and proposing the subject of philosophy in relation to Gramsci, and Gramsci in relation to philosophy (whatever may be meant by that term); and on the other hand, these operations have been carried out in a radically renewed sense as compared with the previous period.

This is due in particular to the new approach to the study of Gramsci that has been developed over the last few decades (especially from the end of the nineteen eighties), most of all in Italy. This approach is due both to the development of a rigorous “Gramscian philosophy”, and to a radical *historicization* of Gramsci’s writings and of the figures and institutions to which he was most of all linked.¹ Today, different from yesterday, it has become clear that the *theoretical* work of Gramsci – as much before as after his arrest in 1926 – may be adequately understood only by comparison not with categories which in the end are extrinsic to his horizons – such, for example, as a “history of philosophy” – as generically understood but with the terms of comparison and the questions that he tried to establish and produce.

It is, in short, indispensable first of all to reconstruct and interpret the ambitious programme of research that Gramsci set himself above all, but not exclusively, in the *Prison Notebooks*. As we now know, this programme began with an extensive research into the history of

¹ We limit ourselves here to refer readers, for the former, to the fundamental work of G. Francioni *L’officina gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei «Quaderni del carcere»* (*The Gramsci Workshop. Hypotheses regarding the structure of the “Prison Notebooks”*), Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1984; for the latter, we refer to the research work, conferences and publications of Rome’s Gramsci Foundation, in particular to the launch of the *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci* (*National Edition of Gramsci’s Writings*) for which see «Laboratoire italien», 18/2016, *Gramsci da un secolo all’altro / Gramsci d’un siècle à l’autre* (*Gramsci from one Century to the Next*), edited by Romain Descendre and Fabio Frosini, <https://doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.1039>.

the Italian intellectuals, accompanied by another, equally vast, enquiry into the concept of intellectuals and the State; these lead into a remarkable extension of the semantic breadth of both. But, at least as regards the *Notes on Philosophy: Materialism and Idealism. First Series* in Notebook 4 [b], it becomes clear that this programme of research also includes (and, as would emerge in time with ever greater priority) the recovery of the nexus between Marxism and philosophy. As we know, this nexus was at the centre of heated debate in the first half of the 1920s, but then dispersed amorphously due to the conditions of extreme difficulty that the Communist Parties found themselves in various European countries. Recovering and bringing this nexus back into operation, as the central axis of strategic elaboration, meant involving the politics of the political party whose General Secretary was Gramsci.

But in the second place (though not second in order of importance) this programme also includes the critique of “traditional philosophy”, namely the traditional way of understanding and hence of doing, philosophy and therefore, together with this, a proposal for the reform of this “traditional” way of doing philosophy. The outcome of all this is the proposal to reformulate and reform Marxism, traditionally understood as *historical materialism*, in terms of a *philosophy of praxis*. The ensemble of this complex strategy is, among other things, the institution of a no longer extrinsic relation between *philosophy and ideology*, between *philosophy and politics*, but also between *philosophy and “critique”*.

2.

Evidently, if the picture sketched out above corresponds to the true situation, there is a new generation of Gramsci scholars that has begun, or is beginning, research with these new coordinates in mind. We have therefore thought the time to be ripe for attempting to offer a picture, if not exhaustive then certainly significant, of the way in which work is currently being carried out on Gramsci, and especially on his most important (non-)work, the *Prison Notebooks*. This initiative has been taken since the interest in the subject chosen for this *dossier* has been growing strongly, and since work is being done

on the subject – even though in a non-uniform way – that takes into account the premises that we have tried to outline.²

Coming now to the content of each of the various contributions, it may be observed first of all that a good number of them come to terms – from quite different perspectives and intentions one from another – with Gramsci’s redefinition of Marxism in terms of the *philosophy of praxis*. Agustín Artese, in his work *La crisis como método y la historia del Estado en los Cuadernos de la cárcel de Antonio Gramsci* (*Crisis as Method and the History of the State in Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks*) analyses from a genetic and diachronic viewpoint – a perspective that characterizes various other contributions in this number of the IGJ – the concept of crisis as a fundamental epistemological instrument of a science of politics, the expression of a philosophy of praxis. Such a philosophy is able to overcome the dichotomy between the structure and superstructure of the Marxist vulgate, translating it into the study of the relations of forces. Dante Aragón, in intervening on the *Filosofía y gran política desde los márgenes: potencia y corporalidad a través del Maquiavelo de Gramsci* (*Philosophy and Grand-Scale Politics from the Margins: Power and Corporality Read through the Machiavelli of Gramsci*), and concentrating in particular on the prison notes of 1932, proposes an explicitly Machiavellian reading of Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis as a possible answer to the crisis of hegemony. In his view, with particular reference to Latin America’s cultural and political reality, this can even today still constitute an answer to conservative and neo-liberal hegemony. Giacomo Tarascio deals with *Tempo e subalternità nella filosofia della praxis* (*Time and subalternity in the philosophy of praxis*), taking good account of a series of miscellaneous annotations on the subalterns, not then taken up again in the “special” Notebook 25 and hence usually overlooked by the English-speaking scholars of the *Subaltern Studies* school. From their analysis one gathers, on the one hand, the progressive theoretical enrichment of Gramsci’s definition of subalternity, and on the other, how this has not only a sociological but also a spatial-temporal nature. Miguel Candiotti’s essay is devoted to *Gramsci y la oposición entre materialismo y filosofía de la praxis* (*Gramsci*

² In our view, to this there corresponds the holding, every two years from 2014 onwards, of the Ghilarza Summer School (<https://www.casamuseogramsci.it/it/summerschool/>). It is further not by chance that a number of the participants in this dossier are former students of the GSS.

and the Opposition between Materialism and the Philosophy of Praxis), starts from the “practical materialism” of Marx’s early writings, the greater part of them, moreover, still unpublished during Gramsci’s lifetime. He then goes on to argue that the anti-materialism and anti-objectivism of the *Notebooks*, while not falling into the trap of idealism and subjectivism, does not fully grasp the peculiar nature of Marx’s position. In his reconstruction of the passage *Dal materialismo storico alla filosofia della praxis: Gramsci e «la nuova filosofia»* (*From Historical Materialism to the Philosophy of Praxis: Gramsci and “the New Philosophy”*) Giorgio Grimaldi adopts a different stance. In his view, rather, the characteristic of this latter philosophy is precisely that of going beyond both idealism and materialism, rethinking the immanentism of Machiavelli, the “absolute earthliness” of his thought, in the light of the philosophies of Hegel as well as that of Marx.

It is to the heredity of this great tradition that Natalia Gaboardi links her contribution in *La filosofia della caverna: dall’interpretazione al cambiamento del mondo. “Ideologia” e prassi nei Quaderni del carcere di Antonio Gramsci* (*The Philosophy of the Cave: from Interpretation to Change of the World. “Ideology” and praxis in Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks*). This tradition is juxtaposed with popular conceptions of the world, as contained in common sense, in folklore and in religion, in order to be able to rethink the very concept of ideology in a broader and more comprehensive perspective.

The nexus between the various components of this concept lies at the centre of Robert P. Jackson’s contribution on *Senso comune, buon senso, and philosophy in Gramsci*. His contribution starts from a detailed analysis of the meanings of these terms in the pre-prison and the prison writings, seeking to grasp the internal development and the mutual relations, in aiming at a critical juxtaposition with a number of partial and simplified representations of Gramsci in the literature of the English-speaking world.

Another conceptual galaxy characteristic of Gramsci’s lexis is the subject of Sebastiano Pirotta’s *Oltre il soggetto: appunti sul Gramsci “molecolare” tra psicologia e “filosofie della vita”* (*Beyond the Subject: Notes on the “Molecular” Gramsci between Psychology and “Philosophy of Life”*). Here, we see a comparison with a series of thinkers – from James to Bergson, from Fouillée to Guyau – who, through their opposition to positivistic determinism, had a deep influence on his youthful formation. In the prison reflections, they are subject to

reconsideration in the light of Gramsci's more mature acquisition of the thought of Marx and Hegel. The subject of the human subject, in its relation to the natural world, returns in Simone Coletto's essay *Una natura umanizzata e un'umanità naturalizzata*. *Pensare con Gramsci il rapporto tra essere umano e natura* (*A Humanized Nature and a Naturalized Humanity. Thinking with Gramsci on the Relationship between the Human Being and Nature*). The refusal of a dualistic and objectivist posing of this relationship presupposes the overcoming of absolute conception of truth, without thereby falling into a sceptical relativism. On the contrary, for Gramsci, this conception is always determined historically and practically, in relation to the evolution of the relations of force between classes: expressed in other words it is a question of hegemony.

The nexus between this latter subject and the fundamental category of translatability is the subject of Giuliano Guzzone's «*Non può esistere quantità senza qualità*». *Una "traduzione" di filosofia, economia e politica nei Quaderni di Gramsci* (*"Quantity Cannot Exist without Quality". A "Translation" of Philosophy, Economy and Politics in Gramsci's Notebooks*). He demonstrates how it is precisely the translatability of languages ("linguaggi") that allows Gramsci to rethink Hegel's passage from quantity to quality in an alternative way to the one proposed by Engels and by Bukharin, a way that is able to take account of the social relations which express an analogous content in different forms.

The dossier concludes with a contribution by Marie Lucas (in collaboration with Fabio Frosini) on *Apostasia popolare e religioni della patria nel Quaderno 20 di Antonio Gramsci* (*Popular Apostasy and Religions of the Fatherland in Antonio Gramsci's Notebook 20*). In the initial stages of the prison reflections, concurrent with the signing of the Concordat between the fascist regime and the Vatican, it seemed that this latter's influence was destined to grow. However in Notebook 20, the special notebook devoted to the catholic church, Gramsci returns to the prediction, as in the early writings, of an unstoppable decline. This he then translates with the near-oxymoron "apostasy of the masses" – to the complete advantage of the parties of the nationalist movements, not only in Italy but in the whole of Europe.

In the Archive section, this number of the journal concludes with the English translation of the entry *Philosophy*, written by Fabio Frosini for the Gramsci Dictionary (*Dizionario gramsciano 1926-1937*).³

³ *Dizionario gramsciano*, ed. G. Liguori and P. Voza, Roma, Carocci 2008.