

Introduction

Giuseppe Cospito - Fabio Frosini

1.

The *dossier* that we offer in this number of the review brings together the written-up contributions made at the Ghilarza Summer School 2023, devoted to *The School and National Education*. We here briefly indicate the reasons why this choice of subject was made for the GSS 2023. In our opinion the school and the related question of “pedagogy” offers an exemplary case of that semantic broadening of key terms of modern politics which Gramsci placed at the basis of all the reasonings he undertook in the notebooks which, starting in 1929, he wrote while in detention. This broadening out, he noted on the term/concept of *intellectual* (but the observation may be extended to others, the *school* and *pedagogy* among them) is indispensable in order «to arrive at a concrete approximation of reality».¹ In our view this conviction supposes that a series of functions and processes of political life were being extended and had proliferated in dimensions going beyond and outside the ones which contained them in previous centuries, and, in any case, which contained them in the dimension of the typical liberal State formed in Europe after 1848. For this reason, a reconnaissance became necessary, open to the possibility of bringing back to both these functions and these processes the phenomena that apparently went outside them.

Expressed in other terms, the expansion of the sphere of politics (not only State politics in the strict sense) in all circles of society constituted the point of arrival of a rethinking of the real working of this latter and, even more so, of the State. In this framework, the function of education, that is of the school in the precise sense, and the exercise in general of more extended pedagogical work, became a crucial passage for the formation and maintenance of hegemony.

Naturally, the attention paid to questions of the school and formation / training is not limited just to the *Notebooks*, even though

¹ Q 4 [c], § 1 [G 49]: *QM*, p. 772; A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. by J. A. Buttigieg, vol. II, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 201. For these and other abbreviations, used in the entire number, please see the list at the end of this *Introduction*.

there the attention takes on a previously absent dramatic importance, since, before, the school and formation were seen in the optic of the exercise of “private” energies rather than those of the State.

Traces of Gramsci’s interest in the school and education are found in his early articles, as well as in a number of pre-prison experiences regarding the formation and training of adults, and in an explicit and motivated fashion in the *Notebooks*. In the specialized literature regarding educational perspectives, his reflections on this question are sometimes dealt with through a *sectorial* key, not particularly appropriate to being incorporated in the articulated complex of his research or to being linked up to the concrete battles of the political militant and party leader. Only in a number of recent readings has a reciprocal “translatability” been singled out between the political problem and – in the broad sense – the pedagogical one, that also includes the idea that the reflection on the formative processes should be understood as being *inside* the philosophy of praxis and not as its more or less marginal appendix. Taken in this sense perspectives of research open out that permit interpretations capable of throwing further light on a passage in *Notebook* 10 contained within a text significantly entitled *Introduction to the Study of Philosophy*. Here, reflecting on the ways on which a «collective will» may be formed on a permanent basis, and adducing to this scope the importance of the “general linguistic question”, Gramsci broadens his view to pedagogy, assigning it a pervasive status, as much in the catalogue of knowledge as in the space-time of social and territorial relations. To this extent he was able to claim that

the educational [pedagogical] relationship should not be restricted to the field of the strictly “scholastic” relationships [...] This form of relationship exists throughout society as a whole and for every individual relative to other individuals. It exists between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between the rulers and the ruled, *elites* and their followers, leaders [*dirigenti*] and led, the vanguard and the body of the army. Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational [pedagogical] relationship.²

For Gramsci, formation is incorporated into the hegemonic apparatus – in the «material structure of ideology», in the «spiritual

² Q 10, § 45 [G II, 44]: *QC*, p. 1331; A. Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2009 (1971), p. 350.

“apparatus of government”» – a fundamental part of which is the school. A «positive educational function» is thus carried out corresponding to «what the productive forces need in order to develop and [...] to the interests of the ruling classes».³ Together with the school, Gramsci lists other «educational» agencies: «libraries [...], associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, the layout of streets, and their names»,⁴ or the «courts» with their «repressive and negative educative function».⁵ Education, school and formation are the terms that – like so many more in the *Notebooks* – undergo, as said above, a marked semantic expansion, which to a certain extent makes it possible to leave to one side the rigid distinction between the “private” functions of “civil society” and the “public ones” of the State-government. In them “force” and “consent”, “discipline” and “liberty” are interwoven, superposed, and this hybrid nature indicates the “pervasiveness” of the educational and formative functions, and their crucial role in the exercise of hegemony.

In consequence, all attempts at the reform of common sense must take account of the ensemble of these dimensions. If the aim is that the subalterns should win spaces of *autonomy*, it is necessary «to realize a hegemonic apparatus» that constitutes «a new ideological terrain» and determines «a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge».⁶ This, consistent with the idea of a *war of position*, could come about – not following the pure and simple destruction of a given hegemonic apparatus – but by way of a struggle that, in its entirety, penetrates all the way through it and reformulates it.

The school – in the literal sense, but also in the wider and metaphorical sense, right up to the idea of the political parties as the «schools of State life»⁷ – and formation in brief constitute nerve centres of the *integral State*. The school, in other words, is an essential articulation of «the State organically and more broadly»⁸ in so far as it includes «not only the apparatus of government but also the

³ Q 8 [b], § 14 [G 179]: *QC*, p. 1049; A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, edit. and transl. by J. A. Buttigieg, vol. III, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 338.

⁴ Q 3, § 50 [G 49]: *QM*, p. 490; *Prison Notebooks*, vol. II, cit., p. 53.

⁵ Q 8 [b], § 14 [G 179]: *QC*, p. 1049; *Prison Notebooks*, vol. III, cit., p. 338.

⁶ Q 10, § 13 [G II, 12]; *QC*, p. 1250; *SPN*, p. 365.

⁷ Q 7 [c], § 42 [G 90]: *QC*, p. 920; *Prison Notebooks*, vol. III, cit., p. 217.

⁸ Q 6, § 87: *QC*, p. 763; *Prison Notebooks*, vol. III, cit., p. 74.

“private” apparatus of hegemony or civil society». ⁹ It may be that, by taking part in the sedimentation and spreading of one or more conceptions of the world, the school makes a contribution as much to the critique as to the “construction” of common sense, namely to the production of that «hub» of multiple «relations» ¹⁰ which Gramsci, referring to the *Theses on Feuerbach*, calls «human reality». To speak therefore, of the school and of formation means both posing questions of lemmas such as *molecular* and *personality*, and pushing further along other paths of the prison research, such as those relating to *Taylorism*, *Fordism*, and the *formation of a new type of human* bound up with the affirmation of a new type of production not only of commodities but of «forms of life». It means, in conclusion, making a thorough study of problematics such as the spontaneity / leadership relation or the role of intellectuals in the elaboration of conceptions of the world and the direction of social processes.

2.

The *dossier* opens with an essay by Massimo Baldacci centred on the inseparable link between pedagogy, understood in the “broad” sense as defined above, and the philosophy of praxis, in that both are part of a process aimed at combating backward-looking conceptions of the world (“folklore”) and raising “common sense” to the height of the most advanced modern thought, by fostering a “moral and intellectual reform”, without which any emancipation of the subaltern groups is impossible. The link between education and the philosophy of praxis is dealt with in the second part of the contribution by Chiara Meta, who initially discusses the centrality of the question of pedagogy in Gramsci’s entire intellectual parabola. This starts from his university training (strongly influenced by the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century and by French spiritualism, as well as by Crocean idealism) to then follow on with his “integral” journalistic activity (to which we return later). The particularity of Gramsci’s pedagogic proposal also emerges from the critical juxtaposition he makes with Italian scholastic institutions, from those taking their inspiration from the Risorgimental Casati educational model to the outcomes

⁹ Q 6, § 137: *QC*, p. 801; *Prison Notebooks*, vol. III, cit., p. 108.

¹⁰ Q 10, § 55 [G II, 54]: *QC*, p. 1345; *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, cit., p. 352.

of the 1923 Gentile reform, with its modifications successive to the 1929 Concordat. As is shown by Marcello Mustè, consequent to the critique of actualist pedagogy and its yielding to catholic hegemony in primary education, there followed Gramsci's proposal for a "common school", that was to be together both humanist and technical.

The relation between pedagogy and philosophy of praxis is dealt with by Giuseppe Cospito, who analyses certain key expressions of Gramsci's prison lexis (referring also to the pre-prison writings). These terms include "conformism", "spontaneity", "discipline" and "conscious leadership", all subject in the *Notebooks* to an audacious and at times provocative reformulation as compared with their usual use; in its turn this reformulation is bound up with overcoming the dichotomy between "public" and "private". The unity/distinction relationship between these two spheres, as shown in Giuliano Guzzone's article, is expressed by Gramsci through the adoption of the Crocean expression "ethical State or State of culture", understood however in a different fashion to Croce and his dialectic of distincts, in order to indicate a stage of transition from the classical liberal State to the "integral" State, which comprises civil society and all relations of a hegemonic nature. But if every hegemonic relationship is also a pedagogical relationship, in Fabio Frosini's analysis this also implies the need to go beyond the parallel between politics and education so as to arrive at rethinking the concept of "personality" in a relational sense. As well as the public educational institutions, this also includes the social practices of education and self-education, in their turn mediated by the "corporative" structures of society itself. These practices, as demonstrated in Pietro Maltese's contribution, appear as functional to the elaboration of a "new type of human", capable of responding to the needs of modern capitalist production, incarnated by Americanism, by Fordism and by Taylorism. These were all questions to which Gramsci paid attention beginning with the «Ordine Nuovo» period, before going into depth in them in the prison reflections.

Among the various bearers of pedagogic practices in a broad sense, Gramsci includes political parties, focused on in Giulio Azzolini's essay. To the extent to which these subjects propose objectives that go beyond restricted interests of the groups of which they are even an expression, they can contribute to the ordered development of society as

a whole; in their historical tendency to “become the State”, the parties are however exposed to the risk of bureaucratic, élitist and authoritarian regression. An essential instrument for the exercise of educational functions by parties – and in particular the socialist and communist parties – is constituted by the daily and periodical press. On this, Leonardo Rapone’s contribution first of all reconstructs the various stages of Gramsci’s activity as a political journalist from 1915 to 1925, and then goes on to deal with the formulation of the concept of “integral journalism” in the *Notebooks* and on the composition of Notebook 24, the “special” notebook expressly devoted to *Journalism*. The education-party linkage is at the centre of the article by Fiamma Lussana, who deals with it through a reconstruction of the “party schools” known, projected and in part realized by Gramsci himself, who in his period in Moscow imbibed the experience of the Schools of Political Education organized by the Communist International, whose model he tried to replicate and “translate” in the political reality of Italy.

The series of contributions proposed by a number of the students at the 2023 GSS opens with the article by Federico Di Blasio, devoted to the concept of the “citizen functionary”. Regarding this figure, Di Blasio analyses passages in the *Notebooks* from the negative interpretation as a mere executor of the political programme of the fascist regime to the category functional to the analysis of the society contemporary to this figure, in the light of the tendency, already referred to, to overcome the dichotomy of public and private. Clara Figueiredo’s essay attempts on the other hand to apply some of Gramsci’s analytic categories, starting with “passive revolution”, to the study of given “morbid functions” of today’s world, with particular regard to Bolsonarism, in which the relations of domination are perpetuated by driving to extremes the “aestheticization of politics” made possible by the *social media*. Sebastián Gómez’s contribution, too, proposes using the concept of “passive revolution” in reference to a context to which – at least explicitly – Gramsci had not referred, meaning Gentile’s school reforms, already discussed above. These were understood as an only partially successful attempt at responding to the “crisis of hegemony” of the 1920s, to which Gramsci’s proposal of a “common school”, more than a concrete proposal, would constitute a sort of alternative “myth” (in the Sorelian sense).

Saskia Kroonenberg's contribution is dedicated to the pedagogical role of literature. She rethinks Gramsci's concept of the national-popular relative to current Italian post-colonial literature and to its emancipatory potential vis-à-vis the subaltern groups, with specific reference to Igiaba Scego's recent volume, *Figli dello stesso cielo. Il razzismo e il colonialismo raccontati ai ragazzi* (*Children of the Same Heaven; Racism and Colonialism Explained to Young People*). Sebastiano Pirotta's article takes as its cue the emphasis that, as from 1915, Gramsci placed on the need to develop a "disinterested" educational and cultural project for the proletariat, in which the initial influence of neoidealist pedagogy is evident. In the *Prison Notebooks*, this influence is however completely rethought in the light of the outlines of the philosophy of praxis. The young Gramsci's insistence on a "disinterested" pedagogy is also underlined in Maria Chiara Pozzoni's essay through her analysis of Gramsci's "theatrical chronicles" which, by criticizing a production aimed at satisfying the tastes of the public with the scope of mere profit, sketches out an alternative model of the theatre able to contribute to the aesthetic and political formation of the proletariat. The *dossier* concludes with Alfonsina Santolalla's contribution, again on the nexus between politics and pedagogy, where this latter is understood as a process of translatability between "spontaneity" and "conscious leadership", exercised at the individual and at the collective level within the broader project of the construction of hegemony, which in its turn is articulated in plural temporalities.

3.

In the *Miscellaneous* section of this number of the IGJ, we publish two more articles. The first is devoted to the *Club of Moral Life* which Gramsci founded in 1917 together with a number of very young friends and comrades (Andrea Viglongo, Carlo Boccardo and Attilio Carena), in order to discuss books and articles that could stimulate formation and self-formation in the process of the conquest of an autonomous and independent personality. The author, Joseph Francese, argues the thesis that a cardinal point of this project was the *Ricordi* (*Meditations*) of Marcus Aurelius, Gramsci's reading of which is well-attested. The second article, by José Luis Moreno Pestaña, starts from the concept – developed in the *Prison Notebooks* –

of the “democratic philosopher” and compares and contrasts it with the one, due to Manuel Sacristán, of “symbolic surplus value”. This tension, the author suggests, could help not only to shed light on a non-secondary side of Sacristán’s interpretation of Gramsci, but also – in the present day – to rethink the role and function of philosophy in relation to emancipation.

Lastly, the *Archive* contains Chiara Meta’s *Gramsci Dictionary* entries on The School and Pedagogy.