

Gramsci, Politics, and Philosophy: A Composite Theory of Ideology

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Although in comparison to other key Gramscian concepts, ideology has not been among the most studied, this is beginning to change. In particular, recent scholarship has demonstrated a diffuse and variegated usage of the term in the Prison Notebooks, as well as an innovative extension of the concept, which is articulated around a network of closely correlated terms and concepts. Nevertheless, debates remain over how to understand its meaning in Gramsci's carceral discourse, with some arguing that his distinctive conception of ideology has a "neutral", and arguably, also "positive" meaning, while others contend that it is neither "neutral", nor "positive", but a critical concept. This essay argues that Gramsci's conception of ideology is neither neutral nor positive, but rather, an eminently critical and differentiated analysis of the diverse ideological forms of consciousness through which the popular masses are enveloped within the web of a class's hegemony through the mediation of the philosophers' philosophies, the fruit of his attempt to rethink philosophy politically. In short, understanding Gramsci's conception of ideology in the full sense can only be ascertained by following the threads of his philosophical investigations in their shifts and re-elaborations.

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1. Introduction

In comparison to other key Gramscian concepts, ideology has not been among the most studied. However, this is beginning to change in the wake of the publication of Valentino Gerratana's critical edition of the *Notebooks*, which enabled scholars to trace the formation and development of Gramsci's central concepts, together with the crucial work of Gianni Francioni, which highlighted the importance of a diachronic and contextualised approach to understanding Gramsci's prison research¹. These have, especially in recent years, contributed to the emergence of a philologically intense "season" of Gramscian studies, particularly in Italy. Central to this new Gramscian research culture is an approach that recognises that Gramsci's conceptual terminology is not fixed and stable in meaning, but instead, exhibits shifts, transformations, and revisions (both minor and major) over the course of the different phases of his work in prison. Whence derives

«the importance of carefully attending to the rhythms of Gramsci's thinking, to the chronological sequence of his notebook entries, to his procedures and methods of analysis and composition, to the shifts and turns that his project undergoes, to the details he introduces, to the minuscule as much as the major revisions he makes,

¹ GRAMSCI 1975, FRANCONI 1984.

to his arrangement and rearrangement of materials, and even to the fragmentariness itself of his whole effort².

This approach has led to new insights regarding Gramsci's concept of ideology, above all in the pioneering work of Guido Liguori³, itself a product of this most recent phase of Gramscian studies, and in particular, the series of workshops and seminars held by the Italian section of the International Gramsci Society dedicated to understanding the conceptual lexicon of the *Notebooks*⁴. More specifically, as regards Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, these studies have demonstrated a diffuse and variegated usage of the term, whose meaning is polysemous, as well as an innovative extension of the concept, which is articulated around a network or family of closely correlated terms and concepts⁵. Nevertheless, debates remain over how to understand its meaning in Gramsci's carceral discourse, with some arguing that his distinctive conception of ideology has a «neutral», and arguably, also «positive» meaning⁶, while others contend that it is neither «neutral», nor «positive», but a critical concept⁷.

Given Gramsci's diffuse and heterogeneous use of the term throughout the *Notebooks*, this essay consequently seeks to examine his explicit attempt to theorise the concept, which occurs in the context of his “return to Marx” beginning in the first series of “Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism”, and is continued in the immediately following second series of “Notes on Philosophy”. Although this takes the initial form of an attempt to elaborate an anti-economistic and anti-reductionist interpretation of ideology, the explicit ascription of agnoseological significance to ideology, and thus, hegemony, suggests the presence of a deeper motivation. Indeed, I argue that Gramsci's initial endeavor to theorise the concept of ideology was not so much a terminal, but more precisely, ends up functioning as a transit or bridge to the deeper project of rethinking the whole of philosophy, including the philosophical status of Marxism, in terms of political relations

² BUTTIGIEG 1992, p. 42.

³ Cf. LIGUORI 2004, 2006, 2015, LIGUORI–VOZA 2009, pp. 399-403.

⁴ Among the most important fruits of these seminars, commenced in 2000, are FROSINI–LIGUORI 2004, and LIGUORI–VOZA 2009.

⁵ This was the theme of the Ghilarza Summer School - Scuola Internazionale di Studi Gramsciani (Ghilarza, September 2016). See <http://www.fondazionegramsci.org/senza-categoria/ghilarza-summer-school-bando-2016/>.

⁶ Cf. THOMAS 2010, p. 96, and LIGUORI 2004, p. 134.

⁷ REHMANN 2013, pp. 119-26.

of hegemony, the gnoseological re-conceptualisation of ideology providing the underlying conceptual framework within which this latter project gets carried out. There is thus, nothing coincidental about the fact that the term and concept of ideology, which was never identified by Gramsci as a specific topic of study worthy of investigation in any of the outlines of his various research plans that we have available⁸, nevertheless finds an explicit formulation in the context of notebooks that were explicitly philosophical, and whose stated aim was precisely that of demonstrating that the «essential part of Marxism consists in its surpassing of the old philosophies and also in its way of conceiving philosophy», that «it renews from top to bottom the whole way of conceiving philosophy»⁹.

I go on to show that this effort to rethink the whole of philosophy politically, gets elaborated through two key discourses or conceptual registers, namely the indissoluble nexus between philosophy and common sense, and between philosophy and ideology. Both are rooted in shifts that occur over the course of Gramsci's philosophical research. Nevertheless, these two modalities through which Gramsci sought to conceptualise the political and hegemonic functions of all philosophy, including Marxist philosophy, converge around the same underlying problematic, namely the need to grasp the complex ideological links binding together intellectuals and masses at its various levels, or more precisely, the hegemonic relations between philosophy, understood in the technical sense as the philosophies or conceptions of the world of professional intellectuals, and the philosophies or conceptions of the world of the popular masses. It is thus, that in the course of these philosophical meditations Gramsci was led to formulate a highly original and distinctive, composite conception of ideology re-articulated around a wider ensemble of terms and concepts, «a *conceptual network* that, taken as a whole, marks out Gramsci's conception of ideology»¹⁰, distinguishable from one another by degree according to an ideological continuum stretching from the intellectuals to the popular masses. The result is not a "neutral" or "positive" understanding of ideology, but rather, an eminently critical and differentiated analysis of the diverse ideological forms of consciousness through which the popular masses are enveloped within the web of a class's hegemony through the mediation of the philosophers' philosophies, undertaken with a view

⁸ For an analysis of Gramsci's various work plans in prison, see FROSINI 2003, pp. 30-72.

⁹ *QC* 4, § 11, pp. 432-33.

¹⁰ LIGUORI 2004, p. 144.

towards igniting an alternative working class hegemony. In short, understanding Gramsci's conception of ideology in the full sense can only be ascertained by following the threads of his philosophical investigations in their shifts and re-elaborations.

2. *Ideology in the Context of the "Return to Marx"*

Throughout the *Notebooks* the term "ideology" appears frequently, in a vast range of contexts, and is employed in ways that often suggest different meanings. Indeed, as Liguori has noted¹¹, this variegated usage manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, on multiple occasions, Gramsci seems to use the term in a general sense to refer to various political ideas or tendencies¹². Other types of ideas, seemingly less directly political in content, are also considered in some way to be ideological¹³. The term is also used to refer to ideas specific to certain social groups¹⁴. Moreover, Liguori correctly identifies the frequent presence of a pejorative usage of the term¹⁵. As these examples indicate, Gramsci frequently employs the term "ideology" in order to denote a wide range of phenomena without consciously theorising the term itself. The term appears, but with little significance insofar as it is not conceptualised¹⁶.

In order to ascertain Gramsci's understanding of ideology, it is necessary to examine his explicit attempt to theorise the concept in the context of his veritable "return to Marx" in the first series of "Notes on Philosophy" in Notebook 4¹⁷.

¹¹ LIGUORI 2004, pp. 140-43.

¹² Cf. *QC* 1, § 44, p. 43, *QC* 1, § 48, p. 61, *QC* 2, § 107, p. 254, *QC* 3, § 78, p. 358, *QC* 6, § 81, p. 752.

¹³ Cf. *QC* 1, § 24, p. 18, *QC* 1, § 44, p. 46, *QC* 1, § 157, p. 138, *QC* 1, § 158, p. 138, *QC* 4, § 67, p. 512.

¹⁴ Cf. *QC* 1, § 43, p. 33, *QC* 1, § 107, p. 98, *QC* 6, § 168, p. 820.

¹⁵ Cf. *QC* 1, § 144, p. 129, *QC* 1, § 151, p. 134, *QC* 3, § 62, p. 342, *QC* 5, § 7, p. 546, *QC* 8, § 27, p. 958, *QC* 9, § 104, p. 1167, *QC* 9, § 107, p. 1171, *QC* 10.II, § 24, p. 1263.

¹⁶ LIGUORI 2004, p. 136.

¹⁷ The commencement of Notebook 4, dating from May 1930, signals emphatically what Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Fabio Frosini, and Francesca Izzo all refer to as Gramsci's "return to Marx", BUCI-GLUCKSMANN 1980, p. 21, FROSINI 2001, p. 33, IZZO 2011, p. 82. Indeed, the fourth notebook, the first of a bloc of notebooks bearing the title "Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism", represents the

As Liguori has already demonstrated¹⁸, the central thrust of this initial attempt to conceptualise ideology lies in Gramsci's utilisation of Marx's 1859 Preface, the principal text to which Gramsci explicitly refers in order to theorise ideology¹⁹, as the basis for an anti-economistic and anti-deterministic re-interpretation of Marx's historical materialism, intended to reinstate the historical efficacy and validity of ideologies, and thus, to confute Croce's claim that Marx's historical materialism reduced the superstructures to mere "appearances" and "illusions", an argument that Gramsci pursues in Notebooks 4 and 7, supplementing this re-reading of the Preface with other Marxian texts, as well as Engels's famous two late letters, in which the latter argued against economistic interpretations of historical materialism and affirmed the historical efficacy of ideologies²⁰. The result is an anti-economistic, and anti-reductionist understanding of ideologies, or superstructures²¹, as the crucial and historically efficacious terrain on which social groups and classes acquire political consciousness, constitute themselves as collective subjects, and struggle.

start of an extended reflection concerning the nature, meaning, and significance of Marx's thought, one which is furthermore, explicitly philosophical and pursued continuously over the course of Notebooks 7 and 8 (the second and third series respectively, of "Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism"), chronologically extending from May 1930 – May 1932.

¹⁸ LIGUORI 2004, pp. 131-39.

¹⁹ Izzo hypothesises that Gramsci could have had access to parts of *The German Ideology* manuscripts in an anthology of works on historical materialism that he obtained while in Russia, IZZO 2009, pp. 45-46. Nevertheless, as Liguori notes, there is no explicit trace of it in Gramsci's work, LIGUORI 2004, p. 132.

²⁰ Cf. *QC* 4, § 15. *Croce and Marx*, pp. 436-37, *QC* 4, § 20. *Croce and Marx*, p. 441, *QC* 4, § 22. *Croce and Marx. The value of ideologies*, *QC* 4, § 38, p. 462, *QC* 7, § 19. *Ideologies*, pp. 868-69, *QC* 7, § 21. *The validity of ideologies*, p. 869, and *QC* 7, § 24. *Structure and superstructure*. Economy and ideology, p. 871.

²¹ Gramsci not only pluralises the superstructures, see Giuseppe Cospito's entry "Superstruttura, superstrutture" in LIGUORI-VOZA 2009, pp. 830-34, but tends to use it interchangeably as a synonym for "ideologies". Cf. *QC* 4, § 15, pp. 436-37, and *QC* 11, § 38, p. 1457. As Thomas argues, «Gramsci understands the superstructures in this sense, as "ideological forms"; as his research progresses, the terms "superstructures" and "ideologies" become almost synonymous», THOMAS 2010, p. 99. Indeed, as Gramsci would later write, «ideology in the sense used in the philosophy of praxis», denotes «the whole ensemble of the superstructures», *QC* 10, II, § 41, i, p. 1299.

Much more significant, and interesting, however, is Gramsci's explicit ascription of a gnoseological status to ideologies, claiming that

«when dealing with the question of the “objectivity” of knowledge from the point of view of historical materialism, the point of departure should be the affirmation by Marx (a well-known passage in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) that “men become conscious (of this conflict) on the ideological level” of juridical, political, religious, artistic, or philosophical forms. But is this consciousness limited solely to the conflict between the material forces of production and the relations of production – as Marx's text literally states – or does it apply to all consciousness, that is, all knowledge? This is the problem that can be worked out with the whole ensemble of the philosophical theory of the value of the ideological superstructures»²².

Violating Marx's epistemological distinction between the scientific examination of the economic conditions of production in political economy, and the ideological forms²³, Gramsci explicitly affirms, in the immediately following note, that «Marx's assertion - that men become conscious of economic conflicts on the terrain of ideology - has a gnoseological and not psychological or moral value»²⁴. The ideological terrain of the superstructures, as Gramsci intimates, constitutes the common and necessary terrain of all consciousness and knowledge, with the consequence that even science is considered to be a superstructure, i.e. an ideology²⁵. In *QC* 4, § 37, as Frosini argues, «Gramsci is reading the Preface on the basis of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the concept of *ideology* on the basis of the reformulation of the question of *truth* in terms of praxis»²⁶. Speaking of «the question of the “objectivity” of knowledge from the point of view of historical materialism», Gramsci's tacit reference point was clearly Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach, in which the latter asserted that «the question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-worldliness [*Diesseitigkeit*] of his thinking in practice»²⁷.

²² *QC* 4, § 37, pp. 454-55.

²³ FROSINI 2003, p. 90, FROSINI 2004, pp. 102-03.

²⁴ *QC* 4, § 38, pp. 464-65.

²⁵ *QC* 4, § 7, p. 430, *QC* 11, § 38, p. 1457.

²⁶ FROSINI 2009, p. 34; ID. 2004, p. 103.

²⁷ MARX-ENGELS 1975-2005, Volume 5, p. 6. I quote Engels's redacted version, since it was this to which Gramsci had access.

This peculiar fusion of the 1859 Preface with Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach²⁸ becomes, in Gramsci's re-reading, the theoretical nucleus for a reconstitution of the traditional categories of truth and knowledge *within* the sphere of ideology; the entire terrain of human consciousness and knowledge is necessarily practically, politically, and ideologically overdetermined, with the consequence that there is no longer any absolute, qualitative distinction between truth and falsity, ideological and non-ideological (or scientific), but rather, quantitative distinctions between different modes of consciousness according to their varying degrees of practical political power (truth, i.e. reality and power)²⁹ *within* the ideological terrain. Truth and knowledge are identified with their varying degrees of practical efficacy on the ideological terrain of political struggle, and in the last analysis, with hegemony, since the gnoseological value of ideology means that hegemony too, is gnoseological³⁰. The necessary site of all thought and relations of knowledge lies inside the concrete terrain of superstructural-ideological struggle, in short, within the political terrain of the struggle for hegemony between antagonistic relations of social, political, and ideological forces³¹.

It is precisely this fusion of truth and knowledge with ideology (and thus, hegemony) which provides the coherent conceptual framework underlying Gramsci's original re-elaboration of the notion of ideology in terms of a constellation of closely correlated terms and concepts, e.g. common sense, folklore, religion, philosophy, distinguishable from one another by degree according to an ideological *continuum*³². However, this project finds its *raison d'être* in Gramsci's attempt to specify the new concept of philosophy that he

²⁸ The peculiarity of this attempt to read two texts in harmony with one another that were composed in radically disparate periods in Marx's intellectual development can be readily conceded. But that Gramsci did so is not surprising considering he received the two texts together in the same German anthology sometime between March-November 1930, translating both together (while reversing the order) at the beginning of Notebook 7, probably at around the same time as he was writing the first series of "Notes on Philosophy" in Notebook 4 (May-November 1930), FROSINI 2003, p. 49.

²⁹ «*Il carattere terreno*» (the "worldly" or "earthly" character) of thought demonstrated in practice, as Gramsci directly translated Marx's term *Diesseitigkeit* - i.e. the "this-worldliness" of thought which concretely proves its truth in practice, *QT*, p. 743.

³⁰ *QC* 4, § 38, pp. 464-65.

³¹ *QC* 4, § 38, pp. 457-58

³² LIGUORI 2004, pp. 144-47; ID. 2015, pp. 80-83.

believes to be implicit in Marxism³³. Thus, immediately following his assertions that the terrain of ideology is gnoseological, and that therefore, the concept of hegemony too, has a gnoseological significance, Gramsci adds, that «this concept, then, should be regarded as Ilyich's greatest contribution to Marxist philosophy, to historical materialism: an original and creative contribution. In this respect, Ilyich advanced Marxism not only in political theory and economics but also in philosophy (that is, by advancing political theory, he also advanced philosophy)»³⁴.

Gramsci's attempt to theorise the concept of ideology within the framework of his initial "return to Marx" in Notebook 4 represents, not a terminal, but more accurately, a transit towards a much deeper motivation, namely, that of fundamentally redefining the entire nature of philosophy in terms of political relations of hegemony. The radical displacement of the traditional categories of truth and knowledge onto the political terrain of ideological struggle will become the foundation for the re-elaboration of philosophy itself as necessarily practically, politically, and ideologically overdetermined. In accordance with Gramsci's re-reading of the second thesis on Feuerbach, the truth, i.e. reality and power of philosophy will not be located on a transcendent plane in relation to the political and ideological terrain; on the contrary, it will find its concrete ground in the real or effective relations of political and class struggle, hence on a *continuum* with ideology, distinguishable from the latter only according to its degree of effectiveness and expansivity from the standpoint of hegemony³⁵. At the same time, the fusion of all thought and knowledge with ideology, and thus, the subversion of the absolute, epistemological distinction between truth and falsity, ideological and non-ideological (or scientific) creates the coherent conceptual framework for the series of quantitative distinctions between diverse ideological forms along a continuum that Gramsci will

³³ Indeed, Gramsci's "return to Marx" in the three series of "Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism", was structured around a determinate plan from the outset, namely, that «the essential part of Marxism consists in its surpassing of the old philosophies and also in its way of conceiving philosophy – and this is what must be systematically demonstrated and developed. In the realm of theory, Marxism is not to be confused with or reduced to any other philosophy; it is original not only because it surpasses previous philosophies but also, and above all, because it opens up a completely new road: in other words, it renews from top to bottom the whole way of conceiving philosophy» - *QC* 4, § 11, pp. 432-3.

³⁴ *QC* 4, § 38, pp. 464-5.

³⁵ FROSINI 2003, p. 91.

develop, distinctions that can be grasped in terms of their respective degrees of practical political effects on the terrain of struggle for hegemony.

3. *Philosophy and Politics: Philosophy and Common Sense*

The nascent threads of this endeavor to rethink all philosophy, including Marxist philosophy, in its indissoluble links with politics, take shape immediately in the wake of Gramsci's gnoseological re-conceptualisation of ideology in the first series, and is continued in the second series³⁶. However, this project undergoes a decisive shift in the third series of "Notes on Philosophy", in which the nexus between philosophy and politics gets elaborated in terms of the nexus between philosophy and common sense, a conceptual dyad not present in Gramsci's pre-prison writings, but which becomes the central axis of Gramsci's thinking in the third series in Notebook 8 and the "special" Notebook 11³⁷. This project develops Gramsci's concern, dating back to his initial March 1927 research plan, with the relation between intellectuals and masses, and thus, resumes the threads of his earlier concern to theorise the notion of common sense (as well as folklore)³⁸, in order to rethink Marxist philosophy as a pedagogical project directed at the intellectual and cultural elevation of the masses, a task which acquires increasing urgency in the spring and summer of 1932, and is developed under the rubric *An introduction to the study of philosophy*, which will form the central theme of the special Notebook 11. Crucially, the problematic of the relation between intellectuals and masses, now integrated into the project of conceptualising the nexus between philosophy and

³⁶ Cf. *QC* 4, § 40, *QC* 4, § 45, *QC* 7, § 33, *QC* 7, § 35, and *QC* 7, § 45.

³⁷ FROSINI 2003, pp. 168, 170.

³⁸ In the 1927 letter, Gramsci outlines four topics to which, provisionally, he would devote himself, *LC*, pp. 54-57. As Frosini argues, the unifying motif of this first research plan is the relation between intellectuals and masses in the construction of a "public spirit", i.e. a shared popular culture, or common way of feeling and thinking understood from the standpoint of the social, political, and cultural, in short, hegemonic functions performed by various types of intellectuals in relation to the masses. The appearance, in the list of "Main topics" from 8 February 1929 that open Notebook 1, of the phrase "common sense", linked by a bracketed reference to "the concept of folklore", can be considered, as he suggests, as a rendering explicit of what was already implicit in the 1927 letter, namely the investigation of the role of intellectuals in shaping popular thought and culture, FROSINI 2003, pp. 31-34, 46.

politics, essentially becomes that of understanding the political relation between philosophy, or the philosophies of individual philosophers, with the wider ideological and cultural world.

Passing through a series of opening notes to the third series that clearly presage the task at hand³⁹, Gramsci argues, in opposition to Bukharin's *Popular Manual*, which reinforces rather than critically transforms the vulgar elements of popular thought, that a Marxist pedagogical program

«should have as its point of departure an analysis and a critique of the philosophy of common sense, which is the “philosophy of nonphilosophers” - in other words, the conception of the world *acritically* absorbed from the various social environments in which the moral individuality of the average person is developed. Common sense is not a single conception, identical in time and place. It is the “folklore” of philosophy, and, like folklore, it appears in countless forms. The fundamental characteristic of common sense consists in its being a disjointed, incoherent, and inconsequential conception of the world that matches the character of the multitudes whose philosophy it is ... Common sense is a disorderly aggregate of philosophical conceptions in which one can find whatever one likes»⁴⁰.

Gramsci is building on his earlier analyses of the common sense conceptions characteristic of popular thought, in particular his first key theorisation of the concept in *QC* 1, § 65⁴¹, those widely held and deeply ingrained views of life and the world that are passively and acritically absorbed by the masses and constituted through continual movement, absorption and re-absorption of various ideas - religious, philosophical, scientific etc.,⁴² and which stands «midway» between philosophy and real

³⁹ See in particular *QC* 8, § 167, *QC* 8, § 169, and *QC* 8, § 171.

⁴⁰ *QC* 8, § 173, pp. 1045-046.

⁴¹ There, he wrote: «every social stratum has its own “common sense” which is ultimately the most widespread conception of life and morals. Every philosophical current leaves a sedimentation of “common sense”: this is the document of its historical reality. Common sense is not something rigid and static; rather, it changes continuously, enriched by scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered into common usage. “Common sense” is the folklore of “philosophy” and stands midway between real “folklore”... and the philosophy, the science, the economics of the scholars. “Common sense” creates the folklore of the future, that is a more or less rigidified phase of a certain time and place. (It will be necessary to establish these concepts firmly by thinking them through in depth.)» (p. 76).

⁴² He writes that the «main components of common sense are provided by religions – not only by the religion that happens to be dominant at a given time but also by

folklore⁴³, but Gramsci adds an important new addition to his understanding of the concept: «the fundamental characteristic of common sense consists in its being a disjointed, incoherent, and inconsequential conception of the world that matches the character of the multitudes whose philosophy it is», «a disorderly aggregate of philosophical conceptions»⁴⁴.

Both in this note, and *QC* 1, § 65, as well as *QC* 1, § 89, we can clearly see the signs of a wider articulation of ideology around a family of terms and concepts, «a *conceptual network* that, taken as a whole, marks out Gramsci's conception of ideology»⁴⁵, distinguishable from one another by degree according to an ideological continuum stretching from the intellectuals to the popular masses, i.e. from philosophy, to common sense and religion, to folklore. The quantitative, i.e. non-absolute, distinction between the different ideological grades is evidenced by the overlap between them – philosophy, science, and the conceptions of the world of scholars and intellectuals getting deposited in popular common sense and folklore, which in turn, contain significant elements of religion, variously understood.

previous religions, popular heretical movements, scientific concepts from the past, etc.»: *QC* 8, § 173, p. 1045

⁴³ In *QC* 1, § 89, *Folklore*, p. 89, he wrote that folklore «ought to be studied as a “conception of the world” of particular social strata which are untouched by modern currents of thought. This conception of the world is not elaborated and systematised because the people, by definition, cannot do such a thing; and it is also multifarious... a mechanical juxtaposition of various conceptions of the world, if it is not, indeed, a museum of fragments of all the conceptions of the world and life that have followed one another throughout history. Even modern thought and science furnish elements of folklore, in that certain scientific statements and certain opinions, torn from their context, fall into the popular domain and are “arranged” within the mosaic of tradition ... Folklore can be understood only as a reflection of the conditions of life of the people, although folklore frequently persists even after those conditions have been modified in bizarre combinations».

⁴⁴ This pejorative understanding of common sense is corroborated by numerous other passages in which, though not explicitly theorising the concept, the term is nevertheless employed in ways that imply a negative overall judgment. Cf. *QC* 4, § 18, p. 439, *QC* 4, § 41, p. 466-67, *QC* 6, § 78, p. 745 and *QC* 6, § 207, p. 844. As Liguori contends, despite Gramsci's occasional use of the term “common sense” with a positive connotation (for example, in *QC* 5, § 39 and *QC* 8, § 151), «his negative judgments on common sense, both implicit and explicit, are a great deal more numerous and also qualitatively significant» (LIGUORI 2015, p. 91).

⁴⁵ LIGUORI 2004, p. 144.

The point of all this is to develop an analytical and conceptual framework that would enable him to grasp the diverse ideological forms binding the masses to the leading class via the mediation of the conceptions of the world of philosophers and intellectuals, that is, to rethink philosophy *tout court* in its truth, reality and power, as practical, political, i.e. hegemonic interventions to mold common sense in order to make it more compliant with the conception of the world of the dominant class. The question is of crucial importance, for the relationship between intellectuals and masses, «“high” philosophy and common sense is assured by “politics”», hence a question of hegemony⁴⁶. Particularly in French philosophical culture, “common sense” has been treated more extensively than elsewhere. In France, «the intellectuals tend to approach the people in order to guide it ideologically and keep it linked with the leading group». From this standpoint, «the attitude of French philosophical culture toward “common sense”» could «provide a model of hegemonic cultural construction»⁴⁷.

This critical, differentiated analysis of the ideological power bloc or continuum linking intellectuals and masses, philosophy and common sense, directly shapes the tasks of intellectuals in the revolutionary party. Indeed, a Marxist pedagogical political program should have as its point of departure an analysis and a critique of the philosophy of common sense, which is the “philosophy of nonphilosophers”. Marxism, or the philosophy of praxis, cannot be understood as a movement dedicated «to developing a specialised culture for a restricted group of intellectuals», but only as one which «in the course of elaborating a superior and scientifically coherent form of thought»⁴⁸, it never fails to remain in contact with the «“simple” and even finds in such contacts the source of the issues that need to be studied and resolved»⁴⁹. But it is not difficult to see why «it must also present itself as a critique of the philosophy of the intellectuals, out of which the history of philosophy arises», «the “high points” of the progress of “common sense”...

⁴⁶ *QC* 8, § 220, p. 1080.

⁴⁷ *QC* 8, § 173, p. 1045. As he put it, «“common sense” has been treated in two ways: 1) it has been placed at the base of philosophy; 2) it has been criticised from the point of view of another philosophy. In reality, however, the result in each case has been to surmount one particular “common sense” in order to create another that is more compliant with the conception of the world of the leading group» (p. 1045).

⁴⁸ As he makes clear in the second draft, «a form of thought superior to common sense», *QC* 11, § 12, p. 1382.

⁴⁹ *QC* 8, § 213, p. 1070-071.

of the most culturally refined strata»⁵⁰. This is because the philosophical activity of intellectuals seeks to impact upon common sense, «to surmount one particular “common sense” in order to create another that is more compliant with the conception of the world of the leading group». It is a question of the intellectuals approaching the people «in order to guide it ideologically and keep it linked with the leading group»⁵¹. As Gramsci writes, «to criticise one’s own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world. It therefore also means criticism of all previous philosophy, in so far as this has left stratified deposits in popular philosophy»⁵². Thus, in the second draft of *QC* 8, § 220, after writing «it must also present itself as a critique of the philosophy of the intellectuals ... the common sense of the most culturally refined strata», he adds «and through these also of popular common sense»⁵³. In short, the relation between intellectuals and masses, «“high” philosophy and common sense is assured by “politics” in the same way that politics assures the relationship between the Catholicism of the intellectuals and of the “simple”»⁵⁴. In other words, the struggle to supersede the existing common sense (and therefore, also religion), and the critique of the philosophies of intellectuals are indissolubly intertwined⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ *QC* 8, § 220, p. 1080.

⁵¹ *QC* 8, § 173, p. 1045.

⁵² *QC* 11, § 12, p. 1376.

⁵³ *QC* 11, § 12, p. 1383.

⁵⁴ *QC* 8, § 220, p. 1080. This may explain why Gramsci considers religion to be such a crucial component of common sense; in *QC* 8, § 213, under the rubric *The problem of “the simple”*, he wrote that «the strength of religions, and especially of Catholicism, resides in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for the unity of the whole mass of believers and do their utmost to forestall the detachment of the upper echelons from the lower strata. The Roman church is the most relentless in the struggle to prevent the “official” formation of two religions, one for the intellectuals and another for the “simple”» (p. 1070).

⁵⁵ When rewriting *QC* 8, § 173 and *QC* 8, § 175 in *QC* 11, § 13, pp. 1396-397, 1401, while speaking of «the great systems of traditional philosophy and the religion of the leaders of the clergy – i.e. the conception of the world of the intellectuals and of high culture», he clarifies that although «these systems are unknown to the multitude and have no direct influence on its way of thinking and acting», they nevertheless «influence the popular masses as an external political force, an element of subordination to an external hegemony», which «limits the original thought of the popular masses in a negative direction, without having the positive effect of a

What differentiates the philosophy the praxis from the position of the Catholic church, as well as traditional philosophies, is clearly delineated in the second draft of *QC* 8, § 220, where Gramsci adds:

«The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the “simple” in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life. If it affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups»⁵⁶.

4. *Philosophy and Politics: Philosophy and Ideology*

Only a month after Gramsci had elaborated the unity of philosophy and politics in terms of the relation between philosophy and common sense under the rubric *An introduction to the study of philosophy*, his research underwent another shift towards the end of the third series of “Notes on Philosophy”, in which his focus shifted towards a deepened study and critique of Croce’s “ethico-political” conception of history. This change of focus, signified by the introduction of another rubric, *Points for an essay on Croce*, becomes the basis for the composition of the first part of Notebook 10, which would in turn fuel the explosion of new theoretical reflections in the much larger second part of the same Notebook. In the context of these meditations, Gramsci’s endeavor to conceptualise the indissoluble connection of philosophy with politics gets elaborated in terms of the necessary unity of all philosophy, including Marxism or the philosophy of

vital ferment of interior transformation of what the masses think in an embryonic and chaotic form about the world and life». After repeating that the «principal elements of common sense are provided by religion, and consequently the relationship between common sense and religion is much more intimate than that between common sense and the philosophical systems of the intellectuals», Gramsci goes on to conclude that a critique must «start in the first place from common sense, then secondly from religion, and only at a third stage move on to the philosophical systems elaborated by traditional intellectual groups», pp. 1396-7, 1401.

⁵⁶ *QC* 11, § 12, pp. 1384-385.

praxis, with ideology, through a polemical reworking of the Crocean conception of religion, an undertaking that involves a noticeable return to his earlier attempt to critically rethink or “translate” the speculative philosophical tradition into its real terms as ideology, the nascent threads of which were beginning to emerge in the first series of “Notes on Philosophy”⁵⁷.

This line of thought in which Gramsci tries to critically rethink all philosophy as a form of politics, i.e. ideology, comes through clearly in the course of subjecting Croce’s conception of history as liberty to a thoroughgoing critique, exploiting the latter’s notion of liberalism as the “religion of liberty”, in order to conceptualise the unavoidable unity of philosophy and ideology. For Gramsci, Croce’s own definition of liberalism as the “religion of liberty”, understood not in the confessional sense, but as the unity of a conception of reality with a corresponding ethic, i.e. a conception of the world that has become “faith”, the foundation of action, not only exposed this idea as an «an unmediated “political ideology”, an instrument of domination and social hegemony»⁵⁸, a «practical instrument of government»⁵⁹, but more profoundly, revealed the nexus, which Croce sought to deny, between his philosophy and ideology, which the latter reduced to erroneous forms of thought linked to immediate practical interest: for Croce «a dangerous confusion» as Gramsci puts it, «between philosophy and ideology, as a result of which even philosophy becomes an “instrument of politics” (i.e. an “error” of practical origin)»⁶⁰.

This critique of Croce pushes Gramsci toward a broader reflection on the political nature of philosophy in general, linking it to Croce’s conception of religion as a prelude to the explicit attempt to redefine philosophy *tout court* as ideology:

«After first distinguishing philosophy from ideology, he has finished up by confusing a political ideology with a world view, thereby demonstrating in practice that the distinction is impossible and that it is not two categories that are being dealt

⁵⁷ Cf. *QC* 8, § 238, p. 1090, in which speculative philosophy is critically translated into its real terms as hegemony, and thus, to ideology.

⁵⁸ *QC* 8, § 112, p. 1007,

⁵⁹ *QC* 10 (*Summary*), p. 1209.

⁶⁰ *QC* 8, § 240, p. 1091. Or, as Gramsci puts it elsewhere, «what matters to Croce is that the intellectuals do not lower themselves to the level of the masses, but understand that ideology, as a practical instrument of government, is one thing, and philosophy and religion another» (*QC* 10.I, § 1, p. 1212).

with but the same historical one, the distinction in it being solely one of degree. One can call philosophy the world view that represents the moral and intellectual life (the catharsis of a particular practical life) of an entire social group, considered dynamically and thus seen not only in its current and unmediated interests but also in its future and mediated ones; while one can call ideology each particular conception of the class's internal groupings, who aim at aiding the resolution of immediate and restricted problems»⁶¹.

In this seminal formulation, it is evident that the framework derived from his earlier gnoseological reformulation of ideology serves as the tacit basis for an explicit general redefinition of philosophy. In accordance with his re-reading of the second thesis on Feuerbach, the truth, i.e. reality and power of all philosophy is not located on a transcendent plane in relation to the political and ideological terrain; on the contrary, it finds its concrete ground in the real or effective relations of political and class struggle, hence on a *continuum* with ideology, distinguishable from the latter only according to its degree of effectiveness and expansivity from the standpoint of hegemony⁶². In the above passage, this way of reformulating philosophy is inscribed within the concrete political terrain of “effective reality”, i.e. of hegemonic struggle between conflicting relations of forces that forms the locus of Gramsci's political ontology of the social body. Ideology corresponds to the most rudimentary level of consciousness of internal class fractions, each «conception of the class's internal groupings, who aim at aiding the resolution of immediate and restricted problems», while philosophy, evidently considered to be, itself, ideological, nevertheless represents a higher, more coherent conception of the world that has moved beyond ideology in terms of degree. Philosophy embraces and incorporates ideological forms of consciousness - the conception of a social group seen *not only* in its current, unmediated interests, but *also* in its future and mediated ones (mediated by the interests of other subordinate social groups to which certain non-fundamental concessions need to be made in order for a hegemonic set of class alliances to be secured)⁶³. Yet it moves beyond the

⁶¹ *QC* 10.I, § 10, p.1231.

⁶² LIGUORI 2004, p. 146, FROSINI 2003, p. 91.

⁶³ As Gramsci explained, «the fact of hegemony presupposes that the interests and tendencies of those groups over whom hegemony is exercised have been taken into account and that a certain equilibrium is established. It presupposes, in other words, that the hegemonic group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind; these sacrifices, however, cannot touch the essential since hegemony is political but also and above all economic; it has its material base in the decisive function

ideological consciousness of limited and partial economic interests towards more general, far-reaching moral, intellectual, and cultural ones, «the clear-cut transition from the structure to complex superstructures», or as he puts in the above passage, the “catharsis” of an entire social group. Expounding upon the latter, he wrote,

«the term “catharsis” can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or -passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into the superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from “objective to subjective” and from “necessity to freedom”. Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the “cathartic” moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis»⁶⁴.

Evidently, the “cathartic” moment corresponds to the highest or maximum degree of «homogeneity and self-consciousness attained by the various social groups» at the level of the political relation of forces, in which there is a recognition that one’s own economic-corporate class interests must ascend beyond these confines, becoming the interests of other subordinate groups:

«This is the most patently “political” phase, which marks the clear-cut transition from the structure to complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies come into contact and confrontation with one another, until one of them - or, at least, a single combination of them - tends to prevail, to dominate, to spread across the entire field, bringing about, in addition to economic and political unity, intellectual and moral unity, not on a corporate but on a universal level: the hegemony of a fundamental social group over the subordinate groups»⁶⁵.

In short, Gramsci redefines philosophy as the conception of the world of a class that has transcended a merely passive, subaltern form of economic-corporate consciousness, thereby becoming capable of

exercised by the hegemonic group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity», *QC* 4, § 38, p. 461.

⁶⁴ *QC* 10.II, § 6, p. 1244.

⁶⁵ *QC* 4, § 38, pp. 457-58.

consolidating itself as a hegemonic class. Philosophy is closely integrated with ideology, and the former is, like the latter, constituted politically and historically within determinate ensembles of social and class relations or, more precisely, the terrain of competing and antagonistic relations of social and political forces, and in which philosophy emerges as the most effective and rationalised comprehension of these struggles in comparison with ideologies, the former representing the catharsis or hegemony of a fundamental social group on the wider intellectual and cultural terrain over the whole of society. In this conception, as Frosini argues, «philosophy is a particular form of ideology, the most coherent and unitary form, therefore capable of unifying the political forces and making them effective at the highest possible level. In the work of philosophy, ultimately assimilable with the process of constructing a hegemony, the opening of a space of truth and the concrete practical construction of a social order coincide»⁶⁶.

The practical realisation and diffusion of a philosophy, or hegemonic conception of the world of a class throughout the entire social fabric fundamentally reshapes the ideological terrain, that is the effective relations of thought and knowledge prevalent in a historically determinate social formation, in this way radically shifting and transforming the actual social and political forces in struggle as their effective center of coordination, organisation, and condensation. It follows that all philosophy, even in the form of abstract speculation, must be critically considered from the standpoint of its practical, political, and ideological effects within the prism of the struggle for hegemony, and therefore must be analysed in terms of its practical effects, or truth-power, following Gramsci's reinterpretation of the second thesis. Thus, in a note entitled *Introduction to the study of philosophy. Translatability of scientific languages*, Gramsci writes:

⁶⁶ FROSINI 2008, pp. 730-31. It should be noted that just before writing *QC* 10.I, § 10 (between mid-April and mid-May 1932), Gramsci had proposed a slightly different variant of the same argument. After contending against Croce's failure to keep philosophy separate from politics, and therefore, ideology, he argues that the distinction between philosophy and ideology is possible, «but it is only of degree (a quantitative distinction) and not qualitative. Ideologies, rather, are the "true" philosophy since they are then those philosophical "vulgarisations" that lead the masses to concrete action, to the transformation of reality. In other words, they are the mass aspect of every philosophical conception» (*QC* 10.II, § 2, pp. 1241-242, probably dating from the first half of April 1932).

«The notes written under this rubric must be grouped in fact under the general rubric on the relations between speculative philosophies and the philosophy of praxis and their reduction to this latter as a political moment that the philosophy of praxis explains “politically”. Reduction of all speculative philosophies to “politics”, to a moment of historico-political life; the philosophy of praxis conceives the reality of human relations of knowledge as an element of political “hegemony”»⁶⁷.

Vice versa, all politics is, implicitly, philosophy. As Gramsci writes, in the C text of the crucial part of *QC* 4, § 38 in which he attributed agnoseological significance to ideology and hegemony, and thus, a philosophical significance to Lenin’s politics of hegemony (claims that are reaffirmed in the second draft), «the realisation of a hegemonic apparatus, insofar as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge, is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact»⁶⁸. Crucially, Gramsci now immediately translates this notion into the terms of Croce’s conception of religion: «in Crocean language: when one succeeds in introducing a new morality in conformity with a new conception of the world, one finishes by introducing the conception as well; in other words, one determines a reform of the whole of philosophy»⁶⁹.

In the of course of theorising the necessary unity of philosophy with politics, and consequently, ideology, under the stimulus provided by Croce’s notion of religion, Gramsci arrives at a set of reflections whose underlying problematic closely resembles that present in the previously examined endeavor to conceptualise the unity of philosophy and politics in terms of the philosophy-common sense relationship, namely the complex links binding the philosophies of individual philosophers and professional intellectuals with the conceptions of the world or philosophies of the popular masses, understood within the prism of hegemony. Confronting the issue of «what should be understood by philosophy», or the «philosophy of an historical epoch», along with the «importance and significance of the philosophies of philosophers in each of these historical epochs», and given Croce’s definition of religion, Gramsci asserts that «the history of philosophy as it is generally understood, that is as the history of philosophers’ philosophies, is the history of attempts made and ideological initiatives undertaken by a specific class of people to change, correct or

⁶⁷ *QC* 10.II, § 6, iv, p. 1245.

⁶⁸ *QC* 10.II, § 12. *Introduction to the study of philosophy*, p. 1250.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

perfect the conceptions of the world that exist in any particular age and thus to change the norms of conduct that go with them; in other words, to change practical activity as a whole».

The historical meaning and significance of philosophy, i.e. the philosophies of philosophers must be rethought in political and ideological terms as hegemonic interventions within a historically determinate cultural and ideological panorama in order to reconstitute ways of seeing and thinking about the world in a way conducive to the solidification of a hegemonic ruling bloc. Consequently, «studying the history and the logic of the various philosophers' philosophies is not enough». Rather, it is necessary to study «the conceptions of the world held by the great masses» as well as «those of the most restricted ruling (or intellectual) groups», and «the links between these various cultural complexes and the philosophy of the philosophers». In this sense, «the philosophy of an age is not the philosophy of this or that philosopher, of this or that group of intellectuals, of this or that broad section of the popular masses». Instead, «it is a process of combination of all these elements, which culminates in an overall trend, in which the culmination becomes a norm of collective action». «The philosophy of an historical epoch» is thus, «nothing other than the mass of variations that the leading group has succeeded in imposing on preceding reality», or in other words, a composite of the entire complex or ensemble of ideological relations linking the popular classes to the ruling groups, and for which the mediating hegemonic functions of philosophy or the philosophers' philosophies provides the cement. What is required is a differentiated analysis of the various ideological grades or levels constitutive of such social blocs: «the philosophical elements proper can be "distinguished", on all their various levels: as philosophers' philosophy and the conceptions of the leading groups (philosophical culture) and as the religions of the great masses. And it can be seen how, at each of these levels, we are dealing with different forms of ideological "combination"»⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ *QC* 10.II, § 17. *Introduction to the study of philosophy*, pp. 1255-256. Crucially, at the same time or just after writing this note (June 1932), Gramsci would rewrite his earlier notes from Notebook 8 in the pivotal *QC* 11, § 12 (June-July 1932), interspersing the discourse of Croce's conception of religion into the note.

5. *Conclusion: A composite conception of ideology*

The result of Gramsci's endeavor to conceptualise the indissoluble unity of all philosophy with politics, and thus, to grasp the complex ideological links binding together intellectuals and masses, or more precisely, the hegemonic relations between the philosophers' philosophies and the philosophies or conceptions of the world of the popular masses, is an original conception of ideology re-articulated around a wider ensemble of terms and concepts, «a *conceptual network* that, taken as a whole, marks out Gramsci's conception of ideology»⁷¹, distinguishable from one another by degree according to an ideological continuum stretching from the intellectuals to the popular masses. It is, in other words, a composite conception of ideology with important ramifications.

Philosophy, understood in the Gramscian sense as a hegemonic conception of the world that binds together a political class bloc of disparate social forces under the direction of the leading fundamental social class, will not be "pure", homogeneous, or monolithic. That is to say, the ideological blocs that Gramsci analyses are necessarily complex, internally differentiated formations. In order for the conceptions of the world elaborated by professional philosophers and intellectuals to succeed in becoming the ideological cement of a hegemonic bloc of social forces, they must succeed in "translating", or re-elaborating, the fundamental or essential interests of the class they represent on the wider superstructural-ideological terrain, i.e. «not on a corporate but on a universal level: the hegemony of a fundamental social group over the subordinate groups»⁷². This process of universalisation «presupposes that the interests and tendencies of those groups over whom hegemony is exercised have been taken into account and that a certain equilibrium is established. It presupposes, in other words, that the hegemonic group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind»⁷³. Hence, the conceptions of the world elaborated by philosophers must take into account the diverse needs and tendencies of the subordinate groups, significantly engaging with their needs and wants. The ceaseless work of

⁷¹ LIGUORI 2004, p. 144.

⁷² *QC* 4, § 38, pp. 457-58.

⁷³ *QC* 4, § 38, p. 461. In the C text, he wrote that the universalisation of class interests requires that the «dominant group is concretely coordinated with the general interests of the subordinate groups ... a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria ... between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups» (*QC* 13, § 17, p. 1584).

coordination, negotiation, and comprise between the interests of the leading and subordinate groups will be reflected in the content of the ideological bloc or complex through which the leading class secures its hegemony. Gramsci's distinctive notion of the «philosophy of an historical epoch» conveys well this idea: the ideological bloc through which subordinate groups are brought under the hegemony of a leading class will be a heterogeneous composite of a multiplicity of interests and conceptions of the world of the social groups and classes that compose it, ranging from the most backward popular strata to the most refined intellectual groups. The philosophy of an age «is a process of combination of all these elements, which culminates in an overall trend». But as we have seen, the struggle for an alternative working class hegemony necessitates a meticulous understanding of the various levels and dimensions of these ideological power blocs in order to identify and exploit the fractures and fissures within these contradictory agglomerations. Gramsci's dilation of the concept of ideology around a constellation of closely correlated concepts that, together, form a stratified ideological continuum was intended precisely for this.

It follows from the above that ruling ideologies, or more precisely, the hegemonic conceptions of the world elaborated by philosophers, in order to be effective, cannot simply be imposed “illusions” on a passive and gullible mass, since they must somehow connect up with the real experiences, needs, feelings, and conceptions of the world of the masses in order to then reflect or redirect them such that they are more compliant with the conception of the world of the ruling group. Consequently, the conceptions of the world or philosophies of the popular masses are not mechanical copies or instantiations of the philosophers' philosophies. Quite the contrary, as is abundantly clear from Gramsci's careful differentiated analysis of popular thought via the concepts of common sense, folklore, and religion, the fundamental characteristic of the philosophies of non-philosophers consists in its being incoherent and disjointed, i.e. a discordant and contradictory amalgam of ideas and values unconsciously and acritically absorbed from the ruling groups, and ideas that are embedded in or reflect, however vaguely and embryonically, their own practical life experiences. If an ideological bloc operates in the interests of a dominant class, it is not through a total or completely successful ideological imposition, but through the incoherence and incapacity to act that such a contradictory composite induces, in short, by preventing the masses from forming a critical and

coherent account of the world in which they live, thereby rendering them politically passive⁷⁴.

Given the inability of the philosophers' philosophies to wholly penetrate popular consciousness, instead leaving deposits and sedimentations in the fragmented, disjointed, and contradictory amalgam of common sense (as well as folklore)⁷⁵, it follows that the masses are never wholly duped, i.e. that those who are oppressed experience hopes, desires, and thoughts which point beyond their present condition, or which can only be properly fulfilled through the supersession of present conditions. Popular thought is "uneven" or "mixed", or in Gramsci's terms, «not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic». «It contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over». Accordingly, «social groups which in some ways express the most developed modernity, lag behind in other respects», and «are therefore incapable of complete historical autonomy»⁷⁶. Consequently, the central task of Marxist theory, understood as a philosophy of praxis that takes the form of an immanent critique of common sense, «is not to introduce a totally new form of knowledge into "everyone"s' individual life but to revitalize an already existing activity and make it "critical"»⁷⁷. It must discover and coherently re-elaborate those elements of consciousness implicit in the average worker's practical activity, «and that really unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the world», since «the average worker has a practical activity but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his activity in and understanding of the world»⁷⁸. It must identify «the healthy nucleus that exists in common sense, the part of it which can be called good sense and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent»⁷⁹. This can only be accomplished if the philosophy of praxis has «as its point of departure an analysis and a critique of the philosophy of common sense ... the

⁷⁴ *QC* 11, § 12, p. 1385.

⁷⁵ As we have seen, these deposits «are unknown to the multitude and have no direct influence on its way of thinking and acting», but they nevertheless «influence the popular masses as an external political force, an element of subordination to an external hegemony», *QC* 11, § 13, p. 1396.

⁷⁶ *QC* 11, § 12, pp. 1376-7.

⁷⁷ *QC* 8, § 220, p. 1080.

⁷⁸ *QC* 8, § 169, pp. 1041-042.

⁷⁹ *QC* 11, § 12, p. 1380, an addition not present in the corresponding A text.

“philosophy of nonphilosophers”⁸⁰. which never «fails to remain in contact with the “simple” and even finds in such contacts the source of the issues that need to be studied and resolved»⁸¹.

The conclusion, on the basis of the above analysis according to which, in the course of Gramsci’s attempt to rethink philosophy as politics, the notion of ideology gets re-elaborated around a network of terms and concepts, can only be that the Gramscian conception of ideology, understood in its dilated sense, is a critical, and not neutral or positive concept. Whether this is conceived in the register of the critical, quantitative distinction of degree between philosophy and ideology, or the greater coherence of philosophy in relation to the incoherence of common sense, it is evident that Gramsci critically distinguished between the different ideology forms – folklore, common sense, religion, philosophy, on the tacit basis of his fundamental approach to understanding various types of ideas in terms of their varying degrees of practical reality and efficacy, or transformative capacity from the standpoint of hegemony, above all proletarian hegemony, in short, on the basis of their varying degrees of truth, reality, and power, deriving from his re-interpretation of ideology on the basis of the second thesis on Feuerbach, in order to comprehend the ideological composite or continuum binding the popular masses to the leading group, with a view towards disaggregating it. The ultimate result of Gramsci’s distinctive critical concept of ideology is a conception capable of addressing the contradiction or tension perspicaciously identified by Rehmann, namely, that any Marxist project must be able to critically and effectively intervene, shift, and transform the existing ideological forms in class society, and is therefore, necessarily co-determined by, or participates, with these ideological forms, while on the other hand, it must develop a strong ideological-critical dimension that enables it to critically transform and supersede them⁸².

⁸⁰ *QC* 8, § 173, pp. 1045-046.

⁸¹ *QC* 8, § 213, p. 1071. This idea is encapsulated in the quantitative distinction of degree between the philosophy of praxis and common sense, *QC* 3, § 48, pp. 330-31, *QC* 11, § 12, p. 1380, *QC* 10.II, § 52, p. 1342, as well as that between philosophy and ideology. Rehmann’s view that Gramsci saw the relation between philosophy and common sense, and between the philosophy of praxis and ideology as a qualitative one, is erroneous, REHMANN 2013, pp. 143-44.

⁸² REHMANN 2013, pp. 144-45.

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