

GRAMSCI'S "PHILOSOPHY OF PRACTICE"

CAMOUFLAGE OR REFOUNDATION OF MARXIST
THOUGHT?¹

To the memory of Christian Riechers (1936-1993)
this late result of a friendship²

Within the framework of Gramsci's prison writings, Notebooks 10 and 11 constitute the 'philosophical' notebooks par excellence."³ Their integrating concept is that of philosophy of praxis. Christian Riechers states⁴ that the phrase "philosophy of praxis" is specific to the terminology of the *Prison Notebooks*, while Derek Boothman writes that "for 'Marxism,' Gramsci normally uses the term 'philosophy of praxis'."⁵ Neither of these statements is precise. Since the appearance of the 1975

¹ From the Introduction to vol 6 of the German critical edition of Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (*Gefängnishefte*, vol 6: *Philosophie der Praxis*, edited and translated by Wolfgang Fritz Haug, with the cooperation of Klaus Bochmann, Peter Jehle, and Gerhard Kuck, Notebooks 10 and 11, Hamburg: Argument 1994). – This version was first published in *Socialism and Democracy*, vol 14, no. 1, spring-summer 2000, pp. 1-19.

² In 1992, in a severe and skeptical review of our first volume, Riechers wrote that three decades earlier he had eagerly pushed us to read Gramsci, but that now, "far removed from Gramscianism," he had to "suffer the consequences" of his earlier enthusiasm. ("Causa finita oder von Paris dazulernen? Überlegungen zu einer kritischen Gesamtausgabe der Gefängnishefte Antonio Gramscis," *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz*, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 77).

³ Gianni Francioni, *L'Officina Gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei "Quaderni del Carcere,"* Napoli 1984, p. 94. [All quotations from Italian sources other than Gramsci himself are here translated from the German versions.-Translators note)

⁴ Christian Riechers, *Antonio Gramsci. Marxismus in Italien*, Frankfurt/M 1970, p. 131.

⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and transl. by Derek Boothman, London 1994, p. x.

Italian critical edition,⁶ it has become possible to see how the concept emerges in Gramsci's prison writings.

ON THE EMERGENCE OF THE EXPRESSION "PHILOSOPHY OF PRACTICE"

While omnipresent *in* Notebooks 10 and 11, the concept appears only sporadically in the earlier ones. In the first six notebooks the expression is used twice, each time in the titles of other works cited.⁷ In the sense of a developing self-understanding, we meet with "philosophy of practice" for the first time in Notebook 7 (1930-31). In this case we have to bear in mind that Gramsci was using the first part of the notebook, from page 2 to page 34a, for translations, and that the first of the translated texts is Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* in Engels's version.⁸ From this point on, the presence of Marx's theses in Gramsci's mind is regularly observable in

⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana, 4 vols., Turin 1975. Critical edition in English edited by Joseph A. Buttigieg (Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, ed. with Introduction by Joseph A. Buttigieg, transl. by Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York, 1991ff). At the time of this writing, only volumes 1 and 2, covering Notebooks 1 through 5, have appeared. All references to Notebooks 1 through 5 will be to the English edition. The Italian edition is cited for all later Notebooks. [Translator's note] In Notebook 4, §28, *Philosophy of Practice* appears as a book title of Lovecchio (vol. 2, p. 166); in Notebook 5, §127 (vol. 2, p. 378), the term appears when Machiavelli's position is designated (in connection with Azzalini's characterization of his books as expressing "immediate political action") as the "philosophy of practice" or "neo-humanism."

⁷ In Notebook 4, §28, *Philosophy of Practice* appears as a book title of Lovecchio (vol. 2, p. 166); in Notebook 5, §127 (vol. 2, p. 378), the term appears when Machiavelli's position is designated (in connection with Azzalini's characterization of his books as expressing "immediate political action") as the "philosophy of practice" or "neo-humanism."

⁸ Publishing Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* posthumously in 1888, Engels modified Marx's text in a way which comes close to forgery (see W.F. Haug, "Feuerbach-Thesen", in *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, vol. 4, Hamburg 1999, pp. 402-420). [See also below, n. 21.-Translator's note]

the thematic motifs and linguistic turns,⁹ even, and especially, when "philosophy of praxis" emerges for the first time as the core concept for the Gramscian project.

The relevant paragraph of Notebook 7 (§35) is captioned *Materialism and Historical Materialism*, and Gramsci gropes his way here, as he did earlier,¹⁰ between an objectivist materialism and Croce's spiritual theory of history.¹¹ The *Theses on Feuerbach*, especially the sixth and the first, open the way for him to deconstruct both positions - the materialist and the Crocean - and to rearticulate their content in a third position. Linked to this is a critique of Croce's taming of Hegelian dialectics as part of a liberal utopia¹² that aims to banish from history the

⁹ See Notebook 7, §§1 and 29.

¹⁰ See Notebook 4, §37 (vol. 2, pp. 176-177): *Idealism-Positivism* (the text is repeated in Notebook 11, §64). In connection with a citation that contains the Catholic criticism of idealism, Gramsci attempts to arrive at a definition of historical materialism: "Clearly, neither materialist nor idealist monism, neither 'matter' nor 'spirit,' but historical materialism, i.e. activity of people (history) in concreto, i.e. applied to a determinate organized 'material' (material forces of production), to 'nature' reshaped by people. Philosophy of the act (praxis), but not of 'the pure act,' on the contrary, of 'the impure,' i.e. the real, act in the profane sense of the word." At one and the same time, a motif taken from Gentile and a distancing from Gentile: "attività dell'uomo in concreto (storia)," philosophy "of the act (praxis)."

¹¹ In Benedetto Croce's own thought this opposition is seen as follows: historical materialism gives "vivid representations, such as marionettes that hang from strings or are propelled upward by a feather"; in contrast, Croce claims for his philosophy of spirit that "the interpretive point of view corresponds to the facts to be interpreted"; within their "representation," "a single life moves, the pictures are clear and illuminating, and the concepts unambiguous and convincing. The facts prove the theory, and the theory proves the facts." (Benedetto Croce, *Die Geschichte als Gedanke und als Tat. Einführung von Hans Barth [History as Thought and Deed]*, quoted from the German ed., transl. by François Bondy, Bern 1944 [1938] Authorized reprint: Hamburg, n.d.)

¹² Hermes Coassin-Spiegel (*Gramsci und Althusser: eine Kritik der Althusser'schen Rezeption von Gramscis Philosophie*, Berlin/W 1983, p. 62, n. 3) traces this back to Bertrando Spaventa.

destructive moment and transform contradictions into differences.¹³ A new access to the dialectic opens up, via the critique of objectivism and through a shift of terrain away from the philosophy of consciousness "outward," into the ensemble of social relations¹⁴ in which forward-projected history mediated by human praxis takes place. Reflection and practical transformation, in actually occurring history [*geschehende Geschichte*], refer to each other. "In this way we also arrive at a fusion, a making into one, of 'philosophy and politics,' of thinking and acting, in other words we arrive at a philosophy of praxis." (Notebook 7, p. §35)

There follows a key motif of the philosophy of praxis developed in Notebooks 10 and 11: the tying of the concept of philosophy to that of hegemony. Gramsci, as he feels his way in the seventh notebook, writes: If "the only 'philosophy' is history in action," then "one can claim that the theorization and realization of hegemony done by Ilyich [Lenin] was also a great 'metaphysical' event." In §12 of Part II of Notebook 10, this motif will appear again, after which it will be worked out in the famous twelfth paragraph of Notebook 11, where the diverse motifs and levels are mutually linked on the basis of common sense and everyman-philosophy and its relation to religion and to the philosophy of the philosophers. One can therefore say that the appearance of the "philosophy of praxis" marks a nodal point whose analysis helps to

¹³ See the coming to terms with Croce's concept of "dialectic of the different" in Notebook 10, Part I, §7.

¹⁴ See Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Die Camera Obscura of Consciousness. A Critique of the Subject-Object-Articulation in Marxism*, Research report for the United Nations University, 1984 (published in German: "Die Camera obscura des Bewusstseins. Kritik der Subjekt/Objekt-Artikulation im Marxismus," in *Die Camera obscura der Ideologie. Philosophie, Ökonomie, Wissenschaft*. Drei Bereichstudien von Stuart Hall, Wolfgang Fritz Haug und Veikko Pietilä. Argument-Sonderband, AS 70, Berlin/West 1984, pp. 18ff).

reveal the inner connection of the reflections which appear and reappear throughout the Prison Notebooks.

In Notebook 8, whose two parts were written at the same time, this connection turns up strategically in the first part of a paragraph captioned "Machiavelli" (§61). The point of departure is the "progress" made by Croce "in Machiavelli studies and in political science." As Gramsci observes, in these areas Croce had "based himself on his differentiation of moments of spirit and on the assertion of a moment of praxis, i.e. of a practical, autonomous and independent spirit, although circularly tied to the total reality via mediation of the dialectic of the different."¹⁵ (Notebook 8, §61). Gramsci now rearticulates these thoughts and moves to a different terrain: "Where, in a philosophy of praxis, everything is praxis, the difference will not be between moments of absolute spirit, but between structure and superstructures; it will be a matter of establishing the dialectical position of political activity as differentiation in the superstructures." In this way, by connecting diverse practices and instances within a concrete historical unity, Gramsci recasts that which is conceived in Croce as the "dialectic of the different." One glimpses in the fragmentary staccato of the entries how the thought develops step by step through this new connection: "concept of historical bloc, i.e. the unity between nature and spirit, unity of opposites and differences."

In the second part of Notebook 8, the *Third series* of the *Notes on Philosophy -- Materialism and Idealism* (§§166-240), "philosophy of

¹⁵ See above n. 12.

praxis" appears first in §198, an A-text¹⁶ reproduced in Notebook 10 (Part II, §31), and this time already as a title, indicating the domain in which Gramsci transcends Crocean philosophy. What is involved is Croce's remark that one cannot speak of a Marxist philosophy, since Marx had simply replaced philosophy by practical activity.¹⁷ Against this, Gramsci argues "that philosophy can only be negated by philosophizing," where he recalls Antonio Labriola's summons "to found a 'philosophy of praxis' on Marxism."¹⁸ This call which, as in its taking

¹⁶ In volume 1 of his English translation of the *Prison Notebooks*, Joseph Buttigieg explains that he had followed the system used by Valentino Gerratana, the editor of the 1975 Italian critical edition. "In the present edition," Buttigieg explains, "as in Gerratana's, two different type-sizes are used in printing the text of the *Prison Notebooks*. The notes which Gramsci crossed out (so neatly that they remain quite legible) are printed in smaller type. Almost all of these cancelled notes—which, following Gerratana, are designated 'A-texts' for descriptive purposes—reappear with minor or major modifications in later notebooks... The notes existing only in a single version and not cancelled by Gramsci—designated 'B-texts'—are printed in larger type. The same larger size type is also used for those notes which consist, partly or wholly, of material derived from previously drafted notes—these are designated as 'C-texts'." Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, op. cit (see n. 5), p. xv.

[Translator's note]

¹⁷ See Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and Marxist Economy*, 1900, cited after the Bari edition 1977, pp. 2-9. The motif is later repeated in greater relief in connection with Engels: "Thus one can see how he liquidates philosophy by dissolving it into the positive sciences and only salvages "the teaching of thought and its laws, i.e. formal logic [!], and of dialectics." (Benedetto Croce, *Lebendiges und Totes in Hegels Philosophie*, German translation by K. Büchler, expanded by the author. Heidelberg 1909, p. 166).

¹⁸ See Antonio Labriola, "Discorrendo di socialismo e di filosofia", in *Scritti filosofici e politici*, ed. by F. Sbarberi, Torino: Einaudi 1973, vol II, p. 702, where he speaks of the "*filosofia della praxis*" as the "midollo," the "marrow" of historical materialism: "This is the philosophy which is immanently present in the things about which it philosophizes. From life to thought, and not from thought to life; this is the realistic process. From labor, which is an operating knowledge, to knowledge as an abstract theory: not the reverse. [...] In these thoughts lies the secret of a formulation by Marx that has confounded so many people, namely that he had *turned* Hegelian dialectics *upside down* [*umgestülpt*]. [...] Just as historical materialism or the philosophy of praxis transcends, by comprehending historical and social human beings in their totality, every form of idealism—in which the empirically existing things are regarded as reflection, reproduction, imitation, example, consequence (or however it is termed) of a somehow presupposed thought—in just the same way it also means the end of naturalistic materialism in the traditional sense which this designation still had until

up by Gramsci, had presumably originated under the direct influence of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*,¹⁹ was explicitly accepted by the early Croce,²⁰ although on the basis of a misunderstanding of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as being essentially epistemological,²¹ a misunderstanding to which the way had been prepared by Labriola and which was made possible by Engels's revision of the Theses.²² Labriola's students, Croce and Gentile, were to perpetuate this misunderstanding in order to accomplish their respective shifts of position in the conviction that they preserved continuity, and in

recently. The intellectual revolution which led to regarding the processes of human history as absolutely objective, occurred simultaneously and in unison with that other intellectual revolution which succeeded in *historicizing* physical nature. For no thinking person is the latter still today a *fact* which was never in *fieri*, a *result* which never has *resulted*, an eternal *stance* that never *proceeds*, and still less the once *created* that is not a continuously occurring *creation*." (Ibid., pp. 702f)

¹⁹ Gerhard Roth, *Gramsci's Philosophie der Praxis – Eine neue Deutung des Marxismus*, Düsseldorf, 1972, p. 16. Roth's remark is directed against Riechers's supposition (1970, op. cit., p. 17) that Labriola had taken over the "philosophy of praxis" from August von Ciezkowski, who appears to have coined the term in his *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, 1838—a source which is nowhere mentioned by Labriola (see Thomas Nemeth, *Gramsci's Philosophy. A Critical Study*, Sussex 1980, p. 66, n. 10; reference is made there to Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge 1971, p. 129).

²⁰ See Benedetto Croce, *Materialismo storico*, op. cit., p. 101, n. 1: "restringendo l'affermazione alla dottrina della conoscenza" (in Gerhard Roth's translation: "by narrowing the claim to epistemology") one could speak "with Labriola of a historical materialism as a philosophy of praxis, or as a special way of grasping and resolving, even of transcending, the problem of thought and being."

²¹ Roth (op. cit., p. 20) is of the opinion "that Labriola unquestionably, like Gentile, took the *Theses on Feuerbach* as his point of departure for linking the problem of the 'philosophizing core of Marxism' (as a philosophy of praxis) with the problem of knowledge and of the subject-object dialectic, and in so doing ignored [...] the decisive turn in Marx to the practical-political changing of reality."

²² Engels, in his 1888 version of the Theses, replaced Marx's "revolutionäre Praxis" with "umwälzende [overturning] praxis." Gentile, who in his Marx book (*La filosofia di Marx. Studi critici*, Pisa 1899) translated the Theses into Italian for the first time, reproduces the passage in a still faultier way as "prassi che si rovescia" ("praxis which is overturned"). Gramsci's translation continues this mistake: "solo come rovesciamento della praxis"—"only as an overturning of praxis," instead of "as a praxis that overturns [is revolutionary]." This false translation promoted an interpretation of the Theses according to the subject-object paradigm with praxis as an identical subject-object.

the same way Mondolfo²³ was able to present his "telistic voluntarism"²⁴ as Marxism.

After this, the concept "philosophy of praxis" is found next in §§220, 232 and 235 of the eighth notebook, all of this constituting the A-Texts used for the writing of Notebook 11.²⁵ Here finally, "philosophy of praxis" has become the name for the project of a new integral Marxist philosophizing, a phrase which encompasses at once the Marxist classics, i.e. historical materialism and Marxism tout court, and thus includes both tradition and rival positions under the name of a project of renewal, and in so doing gives occasion to divergent interpretations.

THE CAMOUFLAGE THESIS

For the Togliatti-sponsored edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in the immediate post-war period, it was decisive to regard "philosophy of praxis" as a camouflage phrase for Marxism. The editor Felice Platone

²³ Rodolfo Mondolfo, *Il materialismo storico in F. Engels*, 1912 (*Le matérialisme historique d'après F. Engels*, translated by S. Jankelevitch, Paris 1917), is, like Gentile's Marx book, hardly read outside Italy. Roth (op. cit., p. 28) considers it possible that Gramsci "knowingly or unknowingly concealed" Mondolfo's influence. See on this also Nermeth (op. cit., p. 36).

²⁴ Mario Tronti, "Tra materialismo dialettico e filosofia della prassi" [1959], cited after Caracciolo/Scalia, *La città futura e il pensiero di Antonio Gramsci* [abbreviated version of the 1959 article], Milan 1976, p. 73.

²⁵ Since Gramsci, in §222 of Notebook 8, refers back to §128 in the first part of the same notebook, which means that this paragraph must have been written before §222, it is possible that the idea of the philosophy of praxis, after having been conceived more specifically in §61, entered from there into the last part of the *Notes or Philosophy III* (§166-240), which were elaborated parallel to the miscellaneous notes (§1-165). In Gerratana's and Francioni's view, Notebook 8 does "not go beyond the first half of 1932" (see Gerratana, *Description of the manuscript*). In Notebook 9, also elaborated chronologically approximately parallel to Notebook 8, the expression "philosophy of praxis" is not found.

even occasionally "translated" (in the sense of replaced) the expression "philosophy of praxis" with "historical materialism" or "Marxism."²⁶ Platone explains: "These writings of Gramsci cannot be understood in their true meaning if one does not recognize that in them are absorbed the advances of Marxism in the first three decades of our century -- thanks to the theoretical work of Lenin and Stalin."²⁷ In other words, the "categorical equation" of "philosophy of praxis" with "Marxism-Leninism" prevailed.²⁸ As late as 1967 Valentino Gerratana, who edited the 1975 critical edition, wrote rather cryptically: "If encrypting (*revisione criptografica*) means both a stylistic and a conceptual reworking, then in specific instances doubt arises about the status of certain variants, such as the replacement of the concept 'class' with that of 'social group.' It would, however, be too bold to assume that this terminological discrepancy could correspond to a replacement of the Marxist doctrine of class struggle by the sociological method of the dynamics of the 'social group'."²⁹ And he continues: "It is certain that philosophy of praxis is for Gramsci not only an arbitrary term-he also used it before the encryption period, but in a narrower sense [...]. Little by little, however, in order to avoid the word 'Marxism,' he always names the part instead of the whole."³⁰ However, as we have seen, there

²⁶ See Roth, op. cit., p. 14. Even a person like Luciano Gruppi (*Il concetto di egemonia in Gramsci*, Rome 1972; in German, *Gramsci. Philosophie der Praxis und die Hegemonie des Proletariats*, transl. by Helmut Drücke in collaboration with Helmer Tralst, Hamburg 1977, see p. 162 et passim) occasionally substitutes "Marxism" for "philosophy of praxis."

²⁷ Cited according to Roth, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁸ Roth, *ibid.*

²⁹ Valentino Gerratana, "Punti di riferimento per una edizione critica dei Quaderni del carcere," in *Prassi rivoluzionaria e storicismo in Gramsci, Critica marxista*, no. 3, Rome 1967, pp. 240-59; cited by, and according to the translation of, Gerhard Roth, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁰ Gerratana, op. cit., p. 257.

can be no question of "little by little." In sum, Gerratana in 1967 makes it clear that he "does not interpret the use of the phrase 'philosophy of praxis' as the signal of Gramsci's possible re-working or further development of Marxism in which 'orthodoxy' is essentially left behind."³¹

This tradition was then followed by Riechers in his 1967 German selection from the *Notebooks*. Indeed, he adds a list of "circumlocutions" for names and concepts "at which the censor could have taken offence." Most of them are names of persons. The conceptual pseudonyms are limited to two:

CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY = MARX'S CAPITAL

PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS= HISTORICAL MATERIALISM, MARXISM

This model was followed by the later German selections from Gramsci up to 1987,³² in spite of the fact that Riechers already in 1970 had declared in the preface to his dissertation: "Philosophy of praxis" appears "in no way only contingently" conditioned, i.e. as a metaphorical camouflage for 'Marxism'" (p. 130). Instead, his studies had convinced him that Gramsci's writings were for years incorrectly associated with Marxism -- "either unwittingly or knowingly." "Marxism [in Gramsci] becomes subjective idealism" (p. 132). In discovering the originality of Gramsci's concept of philosophy of praxis, Riechers thus viewed this expression no longer as a

³¹ Roth, op. cit., p. 15.

³² In Klaus Bochmann's 1984 selection (*Antonio Gramsci. Notizen zur Sprache und Kultur*, Leipzig-Weimar, p. 165) there is the succinct statement: "Philosophy of praxis: camouflaged name for Marxism." Also for Guido Zamiš (*Antonio Gramsci. Gedanken zur Kultur*, Leipzig 1987, p. 268) "philosophy of praxis" simply means "Marxism."

circumlocution prompted by censorship, but rather as signaling Gramsci's actual departure from Marxism.³³

One recognizes here the main pattern according to which minds have long since parted ways on this question, each according to their political orientation. On the basis of Marxism-Leninism, one could only recognize the "philosophy of praxis" as a title for an original philosophizing by Gramsci at the cost of rejecting this thinking as idealistic; if one wanted to protect it from excommunication it was advisable to present the "philosophy of praxis" as a cover for Marxism, and Gramsci's thinking as "the creative application of Marxism-Leninism in Italy."³⁴ Or, one saw Gramsci's thought as a liberating alternative to post-Stalinist ideology. For Annegret Kramer in 1975 it is clear: "Marxism [in Gramsci] is understood as a philosophy of praxis."³⁵ Not least under the influence of Gerhard

³³ For Riechers, the fact that Gramsci does not take the path of a Marx study using the MEGA (on which Croce reported in the "Critica"), shows "how much he was already a prisoner of his own speculative system." Does Riechers not know that Gramsci was no longer able to get such books, that, however, in his list he asks for completely new textbooks in which all of Marx's writings on the critique of political economy would be taken account of? (See Notebook 10, part II, §37.II). Above all, however, does he not see that Gramsci does much more, in that instead of a mere study of Marx, he carries out a study of his own time in the way that Marx himself had done? For Riechers, the fact that Gramsci does not take the path of a Marx study using the MEGA (on which Croce reported in the "Critica"), shows "how much he was already a prisoner of his own speculative system." Does Riechers not know that Gramsci was no longer able to get such books, that, however, in his list he asks for completely new textbooks in which all of Marx's writings on the critique of political economy would be taken account of? (See Notebook 10, part II, §37.II). Above all, however, does he not see that Gramsci does much more, in that instead of a mere study of Marx, he carries out a study of his own time in the way that Marx himself had done?

³⁴ Guido Zamiš (ed.), *Antonio Gramsci. Zu Politik, Geschichte und Kultur*, ausgewählte Schriften, Leipzig 1980, Epilogue, p. 320.

³⁵ Annegret Kramer, "Gramscis Interpretation des Marxismus," in *Gesellschaft-Beiträge zur marxischen Theorie*, 4, Frankfurt/M. (cited according to the reprint in Hans-Heinz Holz and Hansjörg Sandkühler [eds.], *Betr.: Gramsci. Philosophie und revolutionäre*

Roth's careful 1972 study, a sort of Anti-Riechers, she established that "meanwhile it has generally been accepted that Gramsci used the concept 'philosophy of praxis' not simply as a synonym for Marxism, as a mere encryption under prison censorship, but that it represents an accentuation and interpretation."³⁶ But this is by no means everyone's point of view. In 1987 Antonio Santucci, with the authority of the Gramsci Institute behind him, once more declared that the expression "philosophy of praxis" fulfilled the purpose of protecting Gramsci from prison censorship.³⁷ As late as 1991 Kebir frequently repeats the camouflage thesis.³⁸ If this thesis were to hold, one would have to prove that conditions worsened for Gramsci at the point in time when the term "philosophy of praxis" makes its appearance in the Prison Notebooks, absorbing the concepts "Marxism" (though this term was

Politik in Italien, Cologne 1980, p. 148). Kramer defends Gramsci against "the accusation of subjective idealism or voluntarism levelled against him at different times" (ibid.).

³⁶ Op. cit., p. 180, n. 18.

³⁷ Antonio Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci 1897-1937. Guida al pensiero e agli scritti*, Rome 1987, p. 119: "To protect himself from the prison censor, Gramsci as a rule used this expression to signify historical materialism and occasionally to signify Marxism in general." Against this, Nicola Badaloni, also in 1987 ("Filosofia della praxis," in *Antonio Gramsci—Le sue idee nel nostro tempo*, published by *L'Unità*, Rome): "Philosophy of praxis" is "not a linguistic expedient, but something that he takes as the unity of theory and practice" (p. 94).

³⁸ Sabine Kebir, *Antonio Gramscis Zivilgesellschaft*, Hamburg 1991, p. 35: "Due to prison censorship he employed a camouflaged language which not only worked with camouflaged terms for a part of the classical Marxist vocabulary, but introduced, in comparison with the writings of his youth, a new linguistic gesture [*Sprachgestus*]." See also ibid., p. 220, n. 62: "In the present work, text passages are often cited in which 'philosophy of praxis' stands for 'Marxism'." Recently Sabine Kebir modified this thesis to say: "The search for theoretical raisins is very difficult for non-experts in this field: Gramsci for his part had to hide them from the prison censor in a learned labyrinth of historical, linguistic-theoretical and scholarly literary elucidations." The "theoretical raisins" to be hidden from the censor are an unexplained reply to my introduction to the critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in German where it is stated: "Here it is the whole cake which is served, not just the raisins." (*Gefängnishefte*, vol. 1, Hamburg 1991, p. 12)

already earlier abbreviated and hence encrypted as "m.") and "historical materialism"³⁹ (abbreviated as "mat. stor."). We must consult the letters in order to ascertain whether this is the case.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE LETTERS

In Gramsci's *Prison Letters*, the "philosophy of praxis" appears for the first time (likewise as a self-designation) in a letter of May 2, 1932, and is repeated a week later, on May 9, 1932, and a third and final time on May 30, 1932, all of them in letters to Tania Schucht, Gramsci's sister-in-law.⁴⁰ These letters are the reply to Tania's request for help in writing a review of Croce's most recent book, the *History of Europe*.⁴¹ After this, there is only one letter with political-theoretical content: that of June 6, again to Tania, about Benedetto Croce and his privileged position in fascist Italy despite all the frictions. There follows a break in the style and substance of the letters. On July 12, 1932, Gramsci categorically demands that Tania in the future deal only with "*cose familiari*" (family matters) in her letters, and he does this so clearly and simply that no

³⁹ Similarly with the names of Marx (earlier usually "M.") and Engels, who are now called the "founders of the philosophy of praxis."

⁴⁰ These letters were actually written to Piero Sraffa, who used Tania as a cover in order to avoid attracting the attention of the fascist secret police. As Haug notes, these letters are among the most intellectually complex that Gramsci wrote in prison. For an English translation of these letters, see Antonio Gramsci, *Letters from Prison*, vol. 2, ed. by Frank Rosengarten, transl. by Raymond Rosenthal, New York, 1994, pp. 162-182, especially pp. 164f, n. 1. The tactic used by Gramsci and Sraffa nonetheless ran into difficulties with censors and the political police. [*Translator's Note*]

⁴¹ A request which had been prompted by a stratagem of Piero Sraffa's intended to counteract Gramsci's resignation (see Sraffa, *Lettere a Tania per Gramsci*, ed. and introduced by Valentino Gerratana, Rome 1991, p. 59, note). Tania's request was the impetus for the plans for Notebook 10. Sraffa advised Tania to insist to Gramsci that he "dedicate at least two pages of his weekly letter not to personal news but to synopses of his thinking and work" (ibid., p. 58).

reader could suspect any other meaning. The demand is repeated on October 3, 1932. The content from now on, although interrupted by requests for literature, is always about prison conditions and the possibilities of a mitigation of conditions or of a conditional release, along with growing difficulties of getting literature, but above all, and increasingly overshadowing everything else, about illness, insomnia, fear of losing his mind, thoughts of suicide, suffering, which goes beyond what anyone could bear or convey. Occasionally, Gramsci gives way to parables, like that of the man who has fallen into a ditch and is not helped by anyone until he gets himself out of it,⁴² or the Kafkaesque story of the shipwrecked person who finds himself gradually transformed into a cannibal.⁴³ The letters are occasionally censored, and above all Gramsci censors himself and holds his most important correspondent to the same censorship. Whether Gramsci's fear was objectively founded or was the expression of his crisis, cannot be determined.

Just as one can hardly dismiss the thesis that there was a tightening of prison censorship from mid-1932, so in the same way it is difficult to resolve the question of the status of "philosophy of praxis," for the terminological change seems to have been induced by Tania's request for help with her Croce review, and it exists in connection with the flowering of a particularly stimulating and substantive correspondence on Croce. Once again, with the increased self-censorship in mid-1932, it is not a question of verbal camouflage, but rather that theoretical reflections as a whole are banished from the letters. Reading the letters,

⁴² Letter to Julia, June 27, 1932, in Antonio Gramsci, *Letters from Prison*, vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 188f.

⁴³ Letter to Tania, March 6, 1933, *ibid.* pp. 278f.

one would not even think that Gramsci was still working on the project of the Prison *Notebooks*.

THE OPERATIVE MEANING OF "PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS"

Today it is possible to come to a more impartial understanding of the status of the concept "philosophy of praxis" than was earlier the case. In fact, Gramsci's treatment of the contemporary political challenges, especially the boldness of his depictions -- on the one hand, of the fascists and, on the other, of the formations taken then to be Marxist, especially post-Lenin Marxist-Leninist organizations -- speaks rather against the camouflage thesis. It is above all the passages where the name turns up, and the strategic nexus in which it is embedded, that point in another direction. Finally, the question must be decided on the basis of the effectiveness of the concept of "philosophy of praxis" as well as of what was at stake for Gramsci in using the phrase. This in turn demands that we pay heed to the diverse problem-areas where the term is used, and which it links in a political-theoretical project. Only a preliminary sketch of this can be given.

In Notebook 10, the "philosophy of praxis" proves to be the appropriate terrain in which to come to terms with Croce, on the one hand to draw from his critique of metaphysics and of objectivism, and from his political ethics -- on the other hand, to refute his alleged refutation of the Marxian Critique of Political Economy in such a way that the justified moments of Croce's critique are, in the dialectical sense of *Aufhebung*, absorbed and transcended. In Notebook 11, "philosophy of praxis" proves to be just as appropriate for a radical

overturning of that which at the time merged from the Second and Third Internationals and crystallized under the name of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, Marxian thought, understood as "philosophy of praxis," could gain a foothold in the terrain of linguistics,⁴⁴ and potentially even in the realm of semiotics and the unconscious, which was explored by modern scholarship only after the death of Marx.

By critically dissolving the objectivism of *thought-forms*⁴⁵ which were taken over from the natural sciences, the "philosophy of praxis" represents in its contemporary intellectual situation the attempt to rectify a fault which was fateful for the history of ideology in the 20th century, and which consists in the migration and mutation to the right, indeed to Fascism, of elements and motifs of Marxist thinking on praxis (explored in Germany by Ernst Nolte⁴⁶). In Italy, this migration can be seen in the usages and the borrowings of the generation of Antonio Labriola's students: the idea of praxis was taken not only into

⁴⁴ A kind of "linguistic turn" can also be observed in late Marx, above all in his *Marginal Notes to A. Wagner*, in *Marx-Engels Werke* 19, 355-83, esp. pp. 374f.

⁴⁵ Cf. my entry „Denkform“ (*thought-form*) in: *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, vol. 2, Hamburg: Argument 1995, 589-600.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ernst Nolte, "Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus," in A. Gethmann-Siefert and O. Pöggeler, eds., *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, Frankfurt/M 1988, pp. 338-356. Nolte, who is especially concerned with Hermann Schwarz, Alfred Baeumler, and Hans Heyse, as well as with Faust and Grunsky, tries here to demonstrate "a kind of narrow-gauge Marxism" among Nazi philosophers, "who take up and transform what for Marx and Engels sixty years earlier had been taken for granted" (p. 352). A heterogeneous catalogue follows: "historicity instead of eternity" is all right; "critique of abstractions" is invented, since for Marx the "power abstraction" [*Abstraktionskraft*] is fundamental; to ascribe to Marx, as Nolte does, "orientation to the ancient polis" or "attacks on 'money' (ibid.), is all the more grotesque, since Marx mocked such attacks with the argument that money is only the phenomenal form of commodity production. Nolte's catalogue ends with "totality," and the emphasis on "acting."

the liberal camp by Croce, in the form of a "philosophy of practice,"⁴⁷ but also into the fascist camp by Giovanni Gentile -- whose book on Marx,⁴⁸ esteemed en passant even by Lenin,⁴⁹ was recommended by Croce in 1906 at the end of the second edition of his *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica*. The "official" left based itself for the most part on "materialist" objectivism. For Gramsci, the prime example of this, alongside Lenin's philosophy teacher G. V. Plekhanov, is Nikolai Bukharin with his *Theory of Historical Materialism*, the fundamental critique of which, as it appears in Notebook 11, is to prepare the way for a new thinking.

Added to this is the older front, the one opening to social democracy. In view of the dominant objectivity paradigm, it seemed necessary to many theoreticians in social democratic milieux at the time of the first "crisis of Marxism" to ground historical materialism ethically. In Germany and Austria they turned particularly to Neo-Kantianism, which was to fill the role of a First Philosophy, then felt to be vacant. Gramsci saw in such "foundational" borrowings the price paid for the objectivism of a vulgarized Marxism. In Antonio Labriola, he found the task of working out an autonomous and coherent Marxist philosophy addressed; in Benedetto Croce he was impressed by the emphasis on the political-ethical moment as against the political-economic

⁴⁷ Cf. note 6b to the German edition of Notebook 10, Part II, *List of contents*, as well as note 0 to Notebook 10, Part II, *Some methodological criteria*.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Gentile, *La filosofia di Marx*, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Cf. Lenin, "Karl Marx," in *Lenins Werke*, vol. 21, p. 77: "A book of the Idealist and Hegelian Giovanni Gentile, *La filosofia di Marx* (Pisa, 1899), deserves attention-the author notes some important aspects of Marx' materialist dialectic which usually escape the notice of the Kantians, positivists, etc."

reductionist approach to history.⁵⁰ In Marxian thinking he saw, whatever Marx himself thought of it, an implicit philosophy, which needed to be explicitly developed. He was able to pursue this project all the more freely, in that he no longer had traditional philosophy, especially Hegel, as his "bourgeois" point of reference, but already post-Marxian and even post-Marxist philosophy: in its liberal version in Benedetto Croce and in its fascist version in Giovanni Gentile.⁵¹ Croce had to a great degree appropriated the Marxian critique of philosophy and recast it as a liberal one. It is hardly exaggerated to say that his polemical term "philosophism"⁵² overlaps, as regards the critique of apriorism, with the Marxian attack on philosophy as ideological form⁵³ His "absolute idealism" completely excludes the concept of a

⁵⁰ In his *Grundlagen der Politik* (transl. by Hans Feist, München 124, 55), Croce explains his concept of "ethical-political history" (see my note 0a to the German edition of Notebook 10, Part I, §7).

⁵¹ At a meeting in Rome on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Gentile's death, Biagio De Giovanni said that Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* had been inconceivable "without the Gentilian reading of the philosophy of praxis"; Giacomo Marramao added that this reading preceded by 20 years the rediscovery of Marx in the rest of Europe (Enzo Marzo, "Gentile, il filosofo del regime che piace tanto ai comunisti" [Gentile, the regime's philosopher whom the communists like so much], in *Corriere della Sera*, May 21, 1994).

⁵² Cf. Benedetto Croce, *Logic as the Science of Pure Concept*, transl. from the 4th ed. by Felix Noeggerath, Tübingen 1930, pp. 279ff: "Logicism, panlogism or philosophism consists in a trespassing of which philosophy makes itself guilty vis-à-vis history, in that it asserts, to use its own expression, that it can deduce history a priori." [Transl. slightly reworded-WFH.] Against the "frivolous philosophists" and "philosophism" Robespierre had already polemicized. He included among them the encyclopedists and materialists "who, despite the explosive nature of their writings, made a pact with the existing powers"; in opposition to them, he emphatically affirmed (on April 10, 1793) philosophy as a guiding thread of a politics "which is democratic, social and popular" (Georges Labica, *Robespierre. Une politique de la philosophie*, Paris 1990). One of its applications was politically dangerous radical anti-clericalism.

⁵³ On the concept of "ideological form," see my "Outlines for a Theory of the Ideological," in *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology and Culture*, New York 1987, pp. 59-87, and *Elemente einer Theorie des Ideologischen*, Berlin-Hamburg 1993, pp. 58 and 65ff; on "philosophy as ideological form," *ibid.*, pp. 175ff.

philosophy that hovers in a pure state above history."⁵⁴ He wants "absolute immanentism"; thus Hans Barth could consider "that Croce's dissolution of religious mythology and of the idea of metaphysical transcendence has the same meaning as Ludwig Feuerbach's reduction of theology to anthropology."⁵⁵

Accordingly, Gramsci could have seen himself, in relation to Croce, in a position that exhibited analogies to that of Marx in relation to Feuerbach,⁵⁶ except that in this case the elements were combined in a different way. Feuerbach had thought, with Anaxagoras, that "the human being is born *for contemplation of the world*," and consequently that the eye was the allegory of philosophical knowledge, and the disinterested gaze upwards to heaven its beginning.⁵⁷ By contrast, Croce emphasizes praxis and turns against "the traditional idea of philosophy which directs its gaze to heaven and receives or expects the highest

⁵⁴ *History as Thought and Deed*, op. cit., p. 134.

⁵⁵ Hans Barth, Introduction to *History as Thought and Deed*, op. cit., p. 14.

⁵⁶ Looking back to February 1917, Gramsci says in Notebook 10, Part I, §11, that he had at the time been "tendentially a Crocean," and that he had at the time written, "that just as Hegelianism was the precondition for the philosophy of praxis in the nineteenth century [...], Crocean philosophy could be [...] the precondition for a new attempt at the philosophy of praxis in our day." Then he says that he is returning to this idea in a different way: "One must undertake for Croce's philosophical conception the same reworking that the first theoreticians of the philosophy of praxis undertook for the Hegelian conception. This is the only historically fruitful way to adequately reassimilate" the philosophy of praxis with an aim of raising this conception-which has become 'vulgarized' due to the needs of immediately practical life-to the level which it must reach in order to address the more complex tasks imposed by the current development of the struggle." From this quotation, Coassin-Spiegel and Nemeth draw the parallels between the Marx-Hegel and the Gramsci-Croce relationships. In Croce there are moments of Hegel as well as of Feuerbach, which is not surprising in a "post-Marxist."

⁵⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, ed. W. Schuffenhauer, Berlin/GDR 1956, p. 188.

truth from heaven."⁵⁸ For Gramsci, therefore, it was not the critique of philosophy as a thought-form, but rather of speculation as its theoretical "mode of production," that was on the agenda. If Croce declared as the "common property of all of the newer philosophy" "that thought is just as active as action," then Gramsci in contrast transposes thought not back into the observing position, whose mocking on the part of Croce⁵⁹ touched a deep chord in him, but altogether into the world of human activities, into the "praxis" of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. Only by so doing did the "immanence" that Croce claimed, become consummated as *this-worldliness*.⁶⁰

For all these reasons, it was strategically central⁶¹ for Gramsci to win back for the thinking of the labor movement the idea of a philosophy of praxis⁶² which some of Labriola's disciples had, in the course of their conversions, taken in a rightward direction. The impulse of the *Theses on Feuerbach* was susceptible of being estranged and turned toward the

⁵⁸ *History as Thought and Deed*, op. cit., p. 37.

⁵⁹ "Knowledge for knowledge's sake not only has nothing aristocratic or sublime about it, as many imagine; it rather belongs to the idiotic waste of time of idiots and to the moments of idiocy into which we all enter, but still more-it goes absolutely nowhere [*es begibt sich überhaupt nicht*], because it is an internal impossibility, and because, spurred on by practice, material itself and the goal of knowledge slip away from it." (Ibid., pp. 36f.)

⁶⁰ What lives for Croce in Hegel's thought is "il senso dell'immanenza, potremmo dire della *Diesseitigkeit* " ["the sense of immanence," or, better, of "thisworldliness"] (Emilio Agazzi, "Filosofia della prassi e filosofia dello spirito" [1959], in Caracciolo/Scalia, *La città futura*, op. cit., p. 145).

⁶¹ Mario Tronti goes too far in this direction when he says that Gramsci found himself in the situation of "having to rediscover Marxism through the lens of idealism" ("Tra materialismo dialettico e filosofia della prassi" [1959], in Caracciolo/Scalia, *La città futura*, op. cit., p. 88).

⁶² If what is involved is a winning back of the rational core of Crocean idealism, then "back" is meant quite literally, for this rational core "was already contained in a less developed form in Marxism. Idealism, i.e. Croce, had taken it over from Marxism and

right, because in the most influential organized left forces an opposite revisionism prevailed.

In 1959 Mario Tronti laid out the problematic which Gramsci found that thinking derived from Marx faced: "The philosophy of praxis had suffered a double revision [...] On the one side, some of its elements were explicitly or implicitly appropriated by certain idealistic currents (Croce, Gentile, Sorel, Bergson, pragmatism); on the other side, the so-called orthodox, for whom what mattered was a philosophy which was more comprehensive than a simple interpretation of history, believed that they were being orthodox when they identified this philosophy with traditional materialism. [...] And now for Gramsci, Marxism becomes, as the philosophy of praxis, the discovery and winning back of this original core," and at the same time both the resolution of earlier contradictions and "the concept which makes possible the originality and the autonomy of Marxism; the decisive point which distinguishes it both from idealism and from positivism."⁶³ For Tronti the camouflaged-language aspect is secondary. The main thing is: "Gramsci understands theoretical Marxism as the 'philosophy of praxis'."⁶⁴ Gramsci was convinced that the twofold winning back of Marxism from both lopsided revisions was a condition for the possibility of gaining decisive political efficacy. Only a philosophy of praxis reformulated in this direction

re-translated it back into speculative language" (Thomas Nemeth, *Gramsci's Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 6).

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 89f.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 71. Tronti, who tends to a scientific approach, however, limits the content of this philosophy to a methodology with an ideological function: "It wants to be a practical-critical methodology of human knowing and acting: in that way it is the philosophy of praxis." Thus it becomes "la 'Neue Weltanschauung' del proletariato moderno" (ibid., p. 87).

could prove capable of being hegemonic and could attract more demanding layers of intellectuals.

One must have recourse to history to understand why Gramsci, in Notebook 10, directed attention to Croce in contending for a "philosophy of praxis,"⁶⁵ and why he felt that an "Anti-Croce" would be a decisive way forward (see *ibid.*, Part I, §11). However, as Gramsci said in the introduction to Notebook 10, at the time Croce was the "leader of European culture," a true "secular pope," as he remarks in §41.IV. According to Gramsci, there was thus no way around Croce's influence if one were to intervene in the intellectual debate.⁶⁶ Above all, however, Croce was, in Gramsci's view, not wrong in his opposition to the dominant type of Marxism in the international communist movement of the time. Its philosophical materialism, with its objectivist ideology of laws, repressed the importance of praxis and really fell back, therefore, into metaphysics, even when it spoke of dialectics. Precisely because Croce was right, he was especially dangerous to Marxism, whose gravedigger he hoped to be, without differentiating between the tendencies within Marxism. Gramsci's critique of Croce and his taking up of the Crocean challenge in his

⁶⁵ Lucio Colletti, however, thinks, with Augusto del Noce, that the Prison Notebooks relate especially to Gentile: "Gramsci's definition of Marxism as the philosophy of praxis is not a device to fool the prison censor. It was taken up in letter and in spirit from Gentile's *Filosofia di Marx*" (Colletti, "Gentile. L'ora di fare i conti" [The time to settle accounts], Interview in *Corriere della Sera*, May 8, 1994, p. 21).

⁶⁶ Later one could see in this a confinement within the Italian culture of the time, whose after-effects threatened to strengthen provincial tendencies among Italian intellectuals. Thus in 1959 Emilio Agazzi (*op. cit.*, p. 139) pled for an opening to "the most progressive culture" on a world scale. And Luciano Gruppi reproaches Gramsci with "not having clearly enough [seen] that Croce later also contributed to the reprovincialization of Italian culture in leading it away from the problems of science and technology, from the problems of the industrially developed societies of Europe, moving it back, with idealism, to that tradition of humanistic, rhetorical-literary culture typical of Italy." (Gruppi, *Gramsci*, *op. cit.*, p. 130).

critique of the dominant paradigm of Marxism cannot therefore be separated from each other.

In all this, Gramsci must have known that his critique "actually also collided with Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*,"⁶⁷ and indeed head-on, and that it did so, at least in "the tying of truth to praxis,"⁶⁸ in accordance with Marx.⁶⁹ What Gramsci says about the "reality of the external world" are as many heresies which under Stalin's rule would have cost him his head and later, in post-Stalinist state socialism, any possibility of effective activity. For the Italian communists in turn, there were good reasons to moderate the scandal, as they played down the heresy and presented Gramsci's thinking as more conformist than it was. Accordingly, a camouflaging resulted above all from the camouflaged-language thesis itself.

The post-war standardization of language resulting from the camouflage constraints in Marxism-Leninism, whose reasons belong to the past, often persist in the present as rigid habits whose power is not to be discounted. In addition, there is a moment of truth in the camouflaged-language thesis. Perhaps one can agree that the name "philosophy of praxis" unites several functions, that it does combine the function of a camouflage with that of a substantive programmatic

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁸ Marx's "close tying of truth to praxis appears to me to be far from Lenin's thesis of an independent truth in and for itself" (Gruppi, *ibid.*, p. 153). Claudia Mancina turns things around When in her preface to Gruppi she says that Gramsci "conceived of Leninism anew, in that he actualized Marx in a way that is not entirely conveyed through Lenin" ("Hegemonie, Diktatur und Pluralismus. Zur aktuellen Gramsci-Debatte in Italien," in Gruppi, *ibid.*, pp. 7-21 ["Egemonia, dittatura, pluralismo: una polemica su Gramsci," *Critica marxista* 3/4 (1976)1].

⁶⁹ Gramsci couldn't know Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, which were (incompletely) published in Russia in 1929/30.

concept, though under the clear dominance of a renewal project.⁷⁰ One can view the unfinished Gramscian project as the new founding of a Marxist philosophy. However, one can say more cautiously with Verena Kriege⁷¹ that "by means of the critique of newer, politically effective conceptions which needed to be attacked, and by having recourse again to Marx himself, [the Gramscian project] consisted in the renewal of Marxian theory, or its dialectical further development, and in the understanding of this *procedure itself* as a *part of the process* which, for its part, the Marxian theory in its history actually is." In order to conceive of an open becoming, Gramsci therefore needed a concept which takes up the historical figures of Marx and Marxism, but at the same time sees history after Marx, the future in the past, and the horizon of coming possibilities in a categorically open-ended fashion. This thinking is "philosophy" in a sense that Marx implicitly presupposed and only perfunctorily explained in passing and which hardly occurred to him to conceive of as philosophy. It would be a coherent, but non-systemic thinking which grasps the world through human activity. This thinking is seen in the Notebooks in ever new approaches, whether based on direct proximity to the materials or on abstract outlines. It is incomplete, and the problems have since then constantly shifted. However, only in the name of a Marxism "that posits itself simply as science" could one say with Mario Tronti that its goal is indeed "legitimate" but "not

⁷⁰ "Whether or not Gramsci used this pseudonym to avoid the suspicion of the prison censor is unimportant, for it was and is uniquely appropriate in conveying Gramsci's view of Marxism." (Nemeth, *Gramsci's Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 48) Harald Neubert writes in the introduction to his Gramsci anthology (*Antonio Gramsci - vergessener Humanist? Eine Anthologie 1917-1936*, Berlin 1991) that Gramsci used the term "philosophy of praxis" on the one hand on account of the censor, but on the other hand "because he [...] saw the actual meaning of philosophy or rather theory [...] in its practical application" (pp. 8f.).

⁷¹ In a letter to the author.

reached."⁷² It is a thinking that indeed addresses the whole, but from below, with a patient attention to particularity. This made sense for Gramsci because, as he believed, Karl Marx inaugurated "intellectually a whole historical epoch which will probably last centuries" (Notebook 7, §33). This perspective demands and supports a patient attention to the thing to be explored, in its individual specificity, and to the modality of experiment, suggestion, hint, and doubt. Yet the Prison Notebooks only become "a great school against dogmatism, against catechism if one defends them "against a facile popularization of a facile 'knowledge,' that one has conquered once and for all time," and if one accepts them as an unfinished work in progress demanding many continuations. Hence "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, to his arrangement and rearrangement of materials, and even to the fragmentariness itself of his whole effort."⁷³

Translated by Eric Canepa

⁷² Tronti, op. cit., p. 91. Agazzi (op. cit.) is even stricter in the name of the goal of a "Marxism strictly understood as the scientific method of politics" (p. 161): according to him, Gramsci ought to have ceased to see "in historical materialism a 'world conception' (ideology)"; he did not attain "that dialectical merging of theory and practice in the structural moment of the economy which is the true cornerstone of all of Marxism." Hence "his 'speculative surplus': the obstinate adherence to the notion of a 'world concept' as essential for historical materialism" (p. 149).

⁷³ Joseph A. Buttigieg, Introduction to Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. I, New York-Oxford, 1991, p. 42.