

1 Gramsci and the conception of civil society

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1 From society to the state and from the state to society

Modern political thought from Hobbes to Hegel is marked by a constant tendency – though with various solutions – to consider the state or political society, in relation to the state of nature (or natural society), as the supreme and definitive moment of the common and collective life of man considered as a rational being, as the most perfect or less imperfect result of that process of rationalisation of the instincts or passions or interests for which the rule of disorderly strength is transformed into one of controlled liberty. The state is conceived as a product of reason, or as a rational society, the only one in which man can lead a life which conforms to reason, that is, which conforms to his nature. With this tendency, both realistic theories which describe the state as it is (from Machiavelli to the theorists of the ‘reason of state’) as well as the theories of natural law (from Hobbes to Rousseau, to Kant) proposing ideal models of state, and defining how a state should be in order to reach its own end, meet and combine together. The process of rationalisation of the state (the state as rational society), which is characteristic of the latter, merges with the process of statisation of reason, which is characteristic of the former (the reason of state). With Hegel, who represents the disintegration as well as the completion of this process, the two lines become interwoven in such a way that in the *Philosophy of Right* the rationalisation of the state reaches its climax and is at the same time represented not simply as a proposal for an ideal model, but as an understanding of the real historical movement: the rationality of the state is no longer just a necessity but a reality, not just an ideal but an event of history¹ The young Marx was able to capture fully this characteristic of Hegel’s philosophy of right when he wrote in an early

comment 'Hegel is not to be blamed for depicting the nature of the modern state as it is, but for presenting that which is as the *nature of the state*'.²

The rationalisation of the state came about through the constant use of a dichotomic model, where the state is conceived as a positive moment opposed to a pre-state or anti-state society, which is degraded to a negative moment. One can distinguish, even if in a rather schematic way, three principal variants of this model: the state as a radical negation therefore eliminating and overthrowing the natural state i.e. as a renewal or *restauratio ab imis* compared to the phase of human development which precedes the state (Hobbes–Rousseau's model); the state as a conservation–*regulation* of natural society and therefore no longer seen as an *alternative* but as an actualisation or a *perfecting* compared to the phase which precedes it (Locke–Kant's model); the state as the conservation and *supersession* of pre-state society (Hegel), meaning that the state is a *new* moment and not only a perfecting (which differs from the model of Locke–Kant), without, however, constituting an absolute negation and therefore an alternative (which differs from the model of Hobbes and Rousseau). The state of Hobbes and Rousseau completely excludes the state of nature, while Hegel's state *contains* civil society (which is the historicisation of the state of nature or the natural society of the philosophers of natural law). Hegel's state contains civil society and goes beyond it transforming a merely formal universality (*eine formelle Allgemeinheit*, *Enc.*, para. 517) into an organic reality (*organische Wirklichkeit*), differing from Locke's state which contains civil society (still shown in Locke as a natural society) not to overcome it, but to legitimate its existence and its aims.

With Hegel the process of rationalisation of the state reaches the highest point of the parabola. In those same years, with the works of Saint-Simon, which took into account the deep transformation of society resulting not from political revolution but from the industrial revolution, and predicted the coming of a new order which would be regulated by scientists and industrialists against the traditional order upheld by the philosophers and military men,³ the declining parabola had begun: the theory or simply the belief (the myth) of the inevitable withering away of the state. This theory or belief was to become a characteristic trait in the political ideologies which were dominant in the nineteenth century. Marx and Engels would have used it as one of the basic ideas of their system: the state is no longer the reality of the ethical idea, the rational *in se et per se*, but according to the famous definition in *Capital* it is the

'concentrated and organised force of society'⁴ The antithesis to the tradition of the philosophy of natural law which is brought to its culmination in Hegel could not be more complete. In contrast to the first model, the state is no longer conceived as an elimination of the state of nature, but rather as its conservation, prolongation and stabilisation. In the state, the reign of force has not been suppressed, but has been perpetuated, with the only difference that the war of all against all now has been substituted with a war of one side against the other (class struggle, of which the state is the expression and instrument). In contrast with the second model, the society in which the state is the supreme ruler is not a natural society which conforms to the eternal nature of man, but is a historically determinate society characterised by certain forms of production and by certain social relations and therefore the state, as a committee of the dominant class, instead of being the expression of a universal and rational need, is both the repetition and reinforcement of particularistic interests. Finally, in contrast to the third model, the state is no longer presented as the supersession of civil society, but merely as its reflection: such is civil society, such is the state. The state incorporates civil society not in order to change it into something else, but to keep it as it is; civil society, which is historically determined, does not disappear into the state, but reappears in the state with all its concrete determinations.

From this threefold antithesis one can derive the three basic elements of Marx and Engels' doctrine of the state:

- 1 The state as a coercive structure or, as we have said before, as 'concentrated and organized violence of society' i.e. an instrumental conception of the state which is the opposite to the ethical or finalistic one.
- 2 The state as an instrument of class domination, where 'the executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie',⁵ i.e. a particularistic conception of the state as opposed to the universalistic conception which is characteristic of all the theories of natural law including Hegel's.
- 3 The state as a secondary or subordinate moment as regards civil society where 'it is not the State which conditions and regulates civil society, but it is civil society which conditions and regulates the State',⁶ i.e. a negative conception of the state which is in complete opposition to the positive conception of rationalistic thought.

As a coercive, particularistic and subordinate apparatus, the state is not

the final moment of the historical process: the state is a transitory institution. As a consequence of the inversion of the relation between civil society and political society the conception of historical process has been completely turned upside down: progress no longer moves from society to the state, but on the contrary, from the state to society. The line of thought beginning with the conception that the state abolishes the state of nature, ends with the appearance and consolidation of the theory that the state itself must in turn be abolished.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of the state – I am referring particularly to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* – belongs to this new history where the state is not an end in itself, but an apparatus, an instrument. It does not represent universal interests, but particular ones; it is not a separate and superior entity ruling over the underlying society, but it is conditioned by society and thus subordinated to it. It is not a permanent institution, but a transitory one which is bound to disappear with the transformation of the underlying society. It would not be difficult to find amongst the many thousands of pages of the *Prison Notebooks* extracts which refer to the four fundamental themes of the instrumental, particular, subordinate and transitory state. Even so, anyone who has acquired a certain familiarity with Gramsci's works knows that his thought has original and personal features which do not allow easy schematisations – almost always inspired by polemical political motives – such as 'Gramsci is marxist-leninist', or 'he is more of a leninist than a marxist', or 'he is more of a marxist than a leninist', or 'he is neither marxist nor leninist'; as if 'marxism', 'leninism', 'marxism-leninism' were clear and distinct concepts where one can sum up this or that theory or group of theories without leaving any uncertainty whatsoever, and one could use them like a ruler to measure out the length of a wall. When doing any research on Gramsci's thought, the first task is to look for and analyse these personal and original features, not worrying about anything else, except to reconstruct the outlines of a theory which seems fragmentary, dispersed, unsystematic, with some terminological uncertainties which are, however, compensated (especially in his writings from prison), by a deep unity of inspiration. This sometimes over-zealous claim of orthodoxy to a given party line, has provoked a strong reaction which has led many to seek out any sign of heterodoxy or even of apostasy; this excessive defence is generating, if I am not mistaken, an attitude which can even be called iconoclastic and which is still latent, but which can already be perceived through some signs of impatience. But as orthodoxy and heterodoxy are not valid criteria for a

philosophical critique, so exaltation and irreverence are deceiving attitudes for the understanding of a particular moment of the history of thought.

2 Civil society in Hegel and in Marx

To reconstruct Gramsci's political thought the key concept, that is, the one from which it is necessary to start, is that of *civil society*. One must begin with the former rather than with the latter because the way in which Gramsci uses it differs as much from Hegel as from Marx and Engels.

From the time when the problem of the relations between Hegel and Marx moved from the comparison of methods (the use of the dialectic method and the so called overturning) to the comparison of *contents as well* – for this new point of view the works of Lukacs on the young Hegel have been fundamental – the paragraphs where Hegel analysed civil society have been studied with greater attention. The larger or smaller quantity of Hegelianism in Marx is now *also* assessed according to the extent in which Hegel's description of civil society (more precisely of the first part on the system of needs) may be considered as a prefiguration of Marx's analysis and criticism of capitalist society. An opportunity to understand this connection between Marx's analysis of capitalist society and Hegel's analysis of civil society was given by Marx himself in a famous passage from his *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where he writes that in his critical analysis of Hegel's philosophy of right his⁷

investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum total of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, combine under the name of 'civil society', that, however, the anatomy of civil society is to be sought on the political economy.

But, as it turned out, on the one hand interpreters of Hegel's philosophy of right had a tendency to focus their attention on his theory of state and to neglect his analysis of civil society, which only became important in research on Hegel around the 1920s. On the other hand, the scholars of Marx had, for a long time, a tendency to consider the problem of the

connections with Hegel exclusively from the point of view of Marx's acceptance of the dialectical method. It is well known that in the works of the most important Italian scholars of Marx such as Labriola, Croce, Gentile and Mondolfo, some of whom were followers or scholars of Hegel, there is no reference to Hegel's concept of civil society (even though we find it in Sorel). Gramsci is the first marxist writer who uses the concept of civil society for his analysis of society with a textual reference, as we shall see, to Hegel as well.

Yet, differing from the concept of state, which has a long tradition behind it, the concept of civil society, which is derived from Hegel and comes up again and again especially in the language of the marxist theory of society, is used also in philosophical language, but not in such a rigorous or technical way and has varying meanings which need a careful confrontation and some preliminary explanations when used in a comparison. I think it is useful to establish certain points which would need a far more detailed analysis than it is possible to do here or that I am capable of doing.

a In all the tradition of the philosophy of natural law, the expression *societas civilis* does not refer to the pre-state society as it will in the hegelian-marxist tradition, but it is a synonym, according to the Latin use, of political society and therefore of state: Locke uses one or other term indifferently; in Rousseau *état civil* means state; also when Kant who, with Fichte, is the author nearest to Hegel, talks in his *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* of the irresistible tendency whereby nature pushes man towards the constitution of the state, he calls this supreme aim of nature concerning the human species *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.⁵

b In the tradition of natural law, as we know, the two terms of the antithesis are not, as in the hegelian-marxist tradition, civil society—state but by the one of nature—civilisation. The idea that the pre-state stage of humanity is inspired not so much by the antithesis society—State but by the one of nature—civilisation. The idea that the pre-state or natural state is not an asocial state i.e. one of perpetual war, is being upheld also by writers of the philosophy of natural law, and it is seen as a first example of a social state, characterised by the predominance of social relations which are controlled by natural laws, in the same way as family or economic ones were, or it was believed they were. This transformation of the *status naturalis* into a *societas*

naturalis is very clear in the transition from Hobbes–Spinoza to Pufendorf–Locke. Whatever Locke finds in the state of nature i.e. before the state, together with family institutions, work relations, the establishment of property, the circulation of wealth, commerce, etc., shows that even if he calls the state *societas civilis*, the conception he has of the pre-state phase of humanity anticipates far more Hegel's *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* than it continues the *status naturae* of Hobbes–Spinoza. This way of understanding the state of nature as *societas naturalis* reaches the threshold of Hegel both in France and in Germany. The opposition of *société naturelle*, meaning the seat of economic relations, to *société politique* is a constant theme of the physiocratic doctrine. In an extract from Kant's *Metaphysic of Morals*, the work from which Hegel starts his first criticism to the doctrines of natural law, it is clearly said that the state of nature is also a social state and therefore 'it is not the social state that is in opposition to the state of nature, but it is the civil (*bürgerliche*) state, because there can very well be a society in the state of nature, but not a civil society', where the latter means political society i.e. the state, a society, as Kant explains it, which guarantees what is mine and what is yours with public laws.⁹

c With respect to the tradition of natural law, Hegel makes a radical innovation: in the last edition of his laborious and painstaking system of political and social philosophy, which can be found in the 1821 edition of his *Philosophy of Right*, he decides to use the term civil society, which up to his immediate predecessors was used to indicate political society, to mean pre-political society, that is, the phase of human society which up to that time had been called natural society. This is a radical innovation *vis-à-vis* the tradition of natural law, because Hegel, when representing the whole sphere of pre-state relations, abandons the predominantly juridical analyses of the philosophers of natural law who have a tendency to resolve economic relations in their juridical forms (theory of property and of contracts), and he is influenced from his early years by the economists, especially the English ones, for whom economic relations constitute the fibre of pre-state society and where the distinction between pre-state and state is shown increasingly as a distinction between the sphere of economic relations and that of political institutions. We can go back, for this subject, to Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on History of Civil Society* (1767), (translated into German the following year and certainly known to Hegel), where the expression *civil society* (translated into German as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) is more the

antithesis of primitive society than the antithesis of political society (as in Hegel) or of natural society (as in the philosophers of natural law) and it will be substituted by Adam Smith in a similar context with the term *civilized society*.¹⁰ While the adjective 'civil' in English (as in French and in Italian) also has a meaning of non-barbaric, i.e. 'civilised', in the German translation *bürgerliche* (and not *zivilisierte*) the ambiguity between the meaning of non-barbaric and non-state is eliminated, though it leaves the other more serious ambiguity which Hegel's use of the term gives us, which is between pre-state (as antithesis of 'political') and state (as antithesis of 'natural').

d Hegel's terminological innovation has often hidden the true meaning of his substantial innovation, which does not consist, as has often been said, in the discovery and analysis of pre-state society, because this discovery and analysis had already been introduced at least since Locke even though under the name of state of nature or natural society, but it consists in the interpretation which the *Philosophy of Right* gives us: Hegel's civil society, differing from the conception of society from Locke up to the physiocrats, is no longer the reign of a natural order which must be freed from the restrictions and distortions which bad positive laws imposed on it, but, on the contrary, it is the reign 'of dissoluteness, misery and physical and ethical corruption',¹¹ which must be regulated, dominated and annulled in the superior order of the state. With this meaning and this one only, Hegel's civil society, and not the natural society of the philosophers of natural law from Locke to Rousseau to the physiocrats, is a pre-marxist concept. Nevertheless, one must still point out that Hegel's concept of civil society is from a certain aspect wider and from another one more restricted than the concept of civil society as it will later be taken up in the language of Marx and Engels, and which will then be commonly used. Wider because in his civil society Hegel includes not only the sphere of economic relations and the formation of classes, but also the administration of justice as well as the organisation of the police force and that of the corporations, that is two facets of traditional public law. More restricted because in Hegel's trichotomic system (not the dichotomic one of the philosophers of natural law), civil society constitutes the intermediate stage between the family and the state, and therefore does not include all the relations and pre-state institutions (including the family), as do on the contrary the natural society of Locke and civil society in its most common use today. Civil society in Hegel is the sphere of economic relations together with their

external regulations according to the principles of the liberal state, and it is at the same time bourgeois society and bourgeois state. It is in civil society that Hegel concentrates his critique of political economy and of political science, the first being inspired by the principles of natural liberty and the second by the ones of the state of law.

e The meaning of 'civil society', extended to the whole of pre-state social life, as a moment in the development of economic relations which precedes and determines the political moment, and constituting therefore one of the two terms of the antithesis society-state, is established by Marx. Civil society becomes one of the elements of the conceptual system of Marx and Engels, right from Marx's early studies such as *The Jewish Problem*, where the reference to Hegel's distinction between *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and *politischer Staat* constitutes the ground for Marx's criticism to the solution given by Bauer to the Jewish problem,¹² up to Engels' later works such as the essay on Feuerbach where we can find one of his most quoted extracts for its simple and striking clarity: 'The State – the political order is the subordinate, and civil society, *the realm of economic relations*, – the decisive element.'¹³ The importance of the antithesis civil society-state, must also be related to the fact that it is one of the forms through which the fundamental antithesis of the system is expressed, that is the one between structure and superstructure: if it is true that political society does not exhaust the superstructural moment, it is also true that civil society coincides with – meaning that it extends itself as much as – the structure. In the same extract from the *Critique of Political Economy* where Marx refers to Hegel's analysis of civil society, he specifies that 'the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy', and immediately after he examines the thesis of the relations between structure and superstructure in one of his most famous formulations.¹⁴ With this, we should quote and have continually within our reach one of Marx's most important extracts on the subject:¹⁵

The form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces at all previous historical stages, and in its turn determining these, is *civil society*. Already here we see how this civil society is the true source and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high-sounding dramas of princes and states. Civil Society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces. It embraces

the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage and, in so far, transcends the State and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its foreign relations as nationality and inwardly must organise itself as State.

3 Civil society in Gramsci

This brief analysis of the concept of civil society from the philosophers of natural law to Marx¹⁶ leads to the identification, which came about in Marx, between civil society and the structural element. Well, this identification can be considered as the starting point to the analysis of the concept of civil society in Gramsci, because – precisely in the individuation of the nature of civil society and of its placement in the system – Gramsci's theory introduces a profound innovation with respect to the whole marxist tradition. *Civil society in Gramsci does not belong to the structural moment, but to the superstructural one.* In spite of the many analyses that have been made in these last years of Gramsci's concept of civil society, it seems to me that this fundamental point, upon which the whole of Gramsci's conceptual system is based, has not been sufficiently stressed, although a few studies have shown the importance of the superstructural moment in this system.¹⁷ It will be sufficient to quote a famous extract from one of the most important texts in the *Prison Notebooks*.¹⁸

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government.

And he also adds to this a great historical example: for Gramsci, civil society in the Middle Ages is the church understood as the hegemonic apparatus of the ruling group. For the latter did not have its own apparatus, i.e. did not have its own cultural and intellectual organisation, but regarded the universal, ecclesiastical organisation as being that.¹⁹ To paraphrase the passage of Marx quoted above it would be tempting to say that for Gramsci civil society includes not 'the whole of material relationships', but the whole of ideological-cultural

relations; not 'the whole of commercial and industrial life', but the whole of spiritual and intellectual life. Now, if it is true that civil society is, as Marx says 'the real home, the theatre of all history' doesn't this shift in the meaning of civil society in Gramsci induce us to ask the question if, by any chance, he has placed 'the real home, the theatre of all history' elsewhere? We can present the problem of the relations between Marx (and Engels) and Gramsci in this clearer way as well both in Marx and in Gramsci, civil society, and not the state as in Hegel, represents the active and positive moment of historical development. Still, in Marx this active and positive moment is a structural moment, while in Gramsci it is a superstructural one. In other words, what they both stress is no longer the state, as Hegel had done concluding the tradition of the philosophers of natural law, but civil society, meaning that they entirely reversed, in a certain way, Hegel's conception. But with the difference that Marx's reversal implies the transition from the superstructural or conditioned moment to the structural or conditioning one, while Gramsci's reversal happens within the superstructure itself. When one says that Gramsci's marxism consists in the revaluation of civil society *vis-à-vis* the state, one neglects to mention what 'civil society' means for Marx and Gramsci respectively. Let it be made clear that with this I do not want to deny Gramsci's marxism, but I want to point out the fact that the revaluation of civil society is not what links him to Marx, as a superficial reader might think, but what distinguishes him from Marx.

In fact, contrary to what is commonly believed, Gramsci derives his own concept of civil society not from Marx, but openly from Hegel, though with a rather slanted or at least unilateral interpretation of his thought. In a passage from *Past and Present*, Gramsci speaks of civil society 'as Hegel understands it, and in the way in which it is often used in these notes', and he immediately explains that he means civil society 'as the political and cultural hegemony of a social group on the whole of society, as ethical content of the State'²⁰ This brief extract brings into focus two very important points: 1 Gramsci claims that his concept of civil society derives from Hegel's; 2 Hegel's concept of civil society as understood by Gramsci is a superstructural concept. A great difficulty arises from these two points: on the one side, Gramsci derives his thesis on civil society from Hegel and sees it as belonging to the superstructural moment and not to the structural one; but on the other hand, as we have seen, Marx also refers to Hegel's civil society when he identifies civil society with the whole of economic relations, that is with the structural

moment. How can we explain this contrast? I think that the only possible explanation is to be found in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, where civil society includes not only the sphere of economic relations, but also their spontaneous or voluntary forms of organisation i.e. the corporations and their first rudimentary rules in the police state. This interpretation is enhanced by an extract where Gramsci enunciates the problem of 'Hegel's doctrine of parties and associations as the private woof of the State',²¹ and resolves it by observing that Hegel, stressing particularly the importance of political and trade union associations – though still with a vague and primitive conception of association, which is historically inspired by a single example of organisation i.e. the corporative one – surpasses pure constitutionalism (that is a state in which individuals and the government are one in front of the other with no intermediate society) and he 'theorized the parliamentary State with its party system'²² The assertion that Hegel anticipates the parliamentary state with its party regime is inexact:²³ in Hegel's constitutional system, which is limited only to the representation of interests and refuses political representation,²⁴ there is no room for a parliament composed of representatives of the parties, but only for a lower corporative house (alongside an upper hereditary house). But the brief annotation where Gramsci, referring to Hegel, speaks of civil society as of 'the ethical content of the State'²⁵ is almost literally exact. Literally exact, if we recognise that Hegel's civil society, which Gramsci refers to, is not the system of needs (from where Marx began), but is of economic relations, but the institutions which rule them and which, as Hegel says, along with the family, constitute 'the ethical root of the State, which is deeply grounded in civil society'²⁶ or from another extract 'the steady foundations of the State', 'the corner stones of public freedom'.²⁷ In short, the civil society which Gramsci has in mind; when he refers to Hegel, is not the one of the initial moment, that is of the explosion of contradictions which the state will have to dominate, but it is that of the final moment, when the organisation and regulation of the various interests (the corporations) provide the basis for the transition towards the state.²⁸

4 The moment of civil society in the relation structure–superstructure and leadership–dictatorship

If Marx identifies civil society with structure, then the transference operated by Gramsci of civil society from the field of structure to the one

of superstructure, can only have a decisive influence on the gramscian conception of the relations between structure and superstructure. The problem of the relations between structure and superstructure in Gramsci has not received up to now the attention it deserves, given the importance that Gramsci himself gives to it. I think that to identify the place of civil society allows us to adopt the right perspective for a deeper analysis. I consider that there are essentially two fundamental differences between Marx's and Gramsci's conceptions of the relations between structure and superstructure.

First of all, of the two moments, although still considered in reciprocal relations to each other, in Marx the former is the primary and subordinating one, while the latter is the secondary and subordinate one. This at least is the case as long as one refers strictly to the text, which is fairly clear and does not question the motives. In Gramsci it is exactly the opposite. We must not forget Marx's famous thesis in the *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a juridical and political superstructure, and to which correspond determinate forms of social consciousness'.²⁹

Gramsci was quite aware of the complexity of the relations between structure and superstructure, and was always opposed to simplistic deterministic interpretations. In an article of 1918, he wrote:³⁰

Between the premise (economic structure) and the consequence (political organization), relations are by no means simple and direct: and it is not only by economic facts that the history of a people can be documented. It is a complex and confusing task to unravel its causes and in order to do so, a deep and widely diffused study of all spiritual and practical activities is needed.

And the following extract already anticipated the problematic of his *Prison Notebooks*: 'it is not the economic structure which directly determines the political action, but it is the interpretation of it and of the so-called laws which rule its development'³¹ In the *Prison Notebooks* this relation is represented by a series of antitheses, among which the following are the most important: economic moment/ethical-political moment; necessity/freedom; objective/subjective. The most important passage, in my opinion, is the following:³²

The term 'catharsis' can be employed to indicate the passage from the

purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from 'objective' to 'subjective' and from 'necessity' to 'freedom'

In each of these three antitheses, the term which indicates the primary and subordinating moment is always the second one. It should be observed that of the two superstructural moments, that of consent and that of force, one has a positive connotation while the other has a negative one, and in this antithesis it is always the first moment that is considered. The superstructure is the moment of catharsis, that is the moment in which necessity is resolved into liberty, understood, in a hegelian way as the awareness of necessity. This transformation comes about as a consequence of the ethico-political moment. Necessity, which is understood as the whole of material conditions which characterise a particular historical situation, is assimilated to the historical past, which is also considered as a part of the structure.³³ Both the historical past and the existing social relations constitute the objective conditions which are recognised by the active historical subject which Gramsci identifies in the collective will. It is only when the objective conditions have been recognised that the active subject becomes free and is able to transform reality. Furthermore, the very moment in which the material conditions are recognised, they become degraded to an instrument for whatever end is desired: 'Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to himself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethical-political form, and into a source of new initiatives'.³⁴ The relation between structure and superstructure, when considered from a naturalistic point of view, is interpreted as a relation of cause-effect, and it leads to historical fatalism.³⁵ But, when considered from the point of view of the active subject of history and of the collective will, it turns into a means-end relation. It is the active subject of history who recognises and pursues the end, and who operates within the superstructural phase using the structure itself as an instrument. Therefore, the structure is no longer the subordinating moment of history, but it becomes the subordinate one. The conceptual transition of the structure-superstructure antithesis can be schematically summarised in the following points: *the ethical-political moment*, being the moment of *freedom* understood as consciousness of *necessity* (that is of material conditions), dominates the *economic* moment through the recognition of *objectivity*

by the active subject of history. It is through this recognition that the *material conditions* are resolved into an *instrument* of action and with this the *desired aim* is reached.

In the second place, Gramsci adds to the principal antithesis between structure and superstructure a secondary one, which develops within the sphere of the superstructure between the moment of civil society and the moment of the state.³⁶ Of these two terms, the first is always the positive moment and the second is always the negative one. This is clearly shown in the list of opposites where Gramsci comments on Guicciardini's statement that the state absolutely needs arms and religion:³⁷

Guicciardini's formula can be translated by various other, less drastic formulae: force and consent; coercion and persuasion; state and church; political society and civil society; politics and morality (Croce's ethical-political history); law and freedom; order and self-discipline; or (with an implicit judgment of somewhat libertarian flavour) violence and fraud.

Gramsci certainly referred to Marx's conception of the state when, in one of his letters from prison (that of the 7 September 1931), he said, on the subject of his research on intellectuals, that:³⁸

This research will also concern the concept of the State, which is usually thought of as political society – i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy – and not as a balance between political society and civil society.

It is true that in Marx's thought, the state – even though understood exclusively as a coercing force – does not occupy the superstructural moment on its own, and that this moment embraces the ideologies as well. But it is also true that in the above quoted extract from the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (which was well-known to Gramsci and to which he could have found a confirmation in the first part of the *German Ideology*, if ever he could have known it),³⁹ ideologies *always* come *after* institutions, as a secondary moment within the same secondary moment, because they are considered as posthumous and mystified-mystifying justifications of class domination. This thesis of Marx had had an authoritative interpretation, at least in Italian theoretical marxism, in the work of Labriola. Labriola had explained that the economic structure determines *in the first place and directly* the rules and the forms of subjection between men, that is the

law (the ethics) and the state, and *in the second place and indirectly* the objects of imagination and thought, in the production of religion and of science.⁴⁰ In Gramsci, the relation between institutions and ideologies is inverted, even within the scheme of a reciprocal action: the ideologies become the primary moment of history, and the institutions the secondary one. Once the moment of civil society is considered as the moment in which the transition from necessity to freedom takes place, the ideologies, which have their historical roots in civil society, are no longer seen just as a posthumous justification of a power which has been formed historically by material conditions, but are seen as forces capable of creating a new history and of collaborating in the formation of a new power, rather than to justify a power which has already been established.

5 Historiographical and practico-political use of the concept of civil society

The really singular position that civil society has in Gramsci's conceptual system causes not one, but two inversions as regards the traditional interpretation of the thought of Marx and Engels: the first consists in the prevalence of the superstructure over the structure; whereas the second consists in the prevalence, within the superstructure itself, of the ideological moment over the institutional moment. As regards the simple dichotomy civil society-state, which has become the current conceptual scheme for the historical interpretations of Marx, Gramsci's scheme is more complex. In fact, it makes use – although the reader might not always realise it – of two dichotomies which only partially overlap: the one between necessity and freedom, which corresponds to the dichotomy between structure and superstructure; and the one between force and consent, which corresponds to the dichotomy between institutions and ideologies. In this more complex scheme, civil society is both the active moment (as opposed to passive) of the first dichotomy, and the positive moment (as opposed to negative) of the second dichotomy. It seems to me that this is the real core of his system.

This interpretation can be proved by observing the consequences that Gramsci draws from his frequent and varied use of the two dichotomies in his reflections from prison. I think that it would be useful and give a clearer understanding if we were to distinguish two different uses of the dichotomies: a merely historiographic one, where the dichotomies are used as canons of historical interpretation–explanation; and a more

directly practico-political one, where the same dichotomies are used as criteria to distinguish what must be done from what must not be done.

In general, I think we can say that in Gramsci's historiographic use, the first dichotomy, the one between the economic moment and the ethico-political moment, serves to individuate the essential elements of the historical process; the second dichotomy, the one between the ethical and the political moment, serves to distinguish the phases of ascent and the phases of decline along the process of history, according to the prevalence of the positive moment or the negative one. In other words, moving from the central concept of Gramsci's thought, that of 'historical bloc' – by which Gramsci means the totality of a historical situation, which includes both the structural and the superstructural element – the first dichotomy serves to define and to delimit a determinate historical bloc, while the second one serves to distinguish a progressive historical bloc from a regressive one. Let me give some examples: the first dichotomy is the conceptual instrument with which Gramsci singles out the Moderate Party and not the Action Party as the movement which led to the unification of Italy (this is one of the fundamental themes of the notes on the Risorgimento); the second dichotomy explains the crisis of Italian society after the First World War, where the dominant class had ceased to be the leading class; a crisis which, because of the fracture between rulers and ruled, can be resolved 'only by the pure exercise of force' ⁴¹ The major symptom of the crisis, that is of the dissolution of a historical bloc, consists in the fact that it is no longer able to attract the intellectuals, who are the protagonists of civil society: the traditional intellectuals preach morals and the untraditional ones build up utopias; in other words, neither have any link with reality ⁴²

Under the practical aspect, that is of political action, the use which Gramsci makes of the first dichotomy constitutes the grounds for his continued polemics against economism, that is against the claim to resolve the historical problem which the oppressed class has to face, operating exclusively within the sphere of economic relations and of the antagonistic forces that they generate (the trade unions). The use of the second dichotomy is one of the greater, if not the greatest, source of reflection from the *Prison Notebooks*, where the stable conquest of power by the subordinate classes is always considered as a function of the transformation which must first be operated in civil society. The two directions towards which Gramsci's criticism moves can be explained only through a complete understanding of the idea that the two dichotomies continually overlap. His criticism is against taking into

account the structure only, because this leads the working class towards a sterile and unresolved class struggle, and it is also against considering the negative moment of the superstructure only, because this too does not lead to a stable and resolute conquest. This battle on two fronts takes place once again in civil society. One front is concerned with the supersession of the material conditions which operate within the structure; the other presents a false resolution of these conditions (i.e. one which would be pure domination without consent). An improper use, or no use at all of one or other element of the dichotomy leads to two opposite errors in theory: the confusion between civil society and structure generates the error of trade unionism; the confusion between civil society and political society generates that of idolatry of the state.⁴³

6 Political leadership and cultural leadership

While the first polemic against economism is connected to the theme of the *party*, the second one against dictatorship – which is not accompanied by a reform of civil society – brings forward the theme of *hegemony*. The analyses which have just been made put us in the best position to understand that the themes of the party and of hegemony occupy a central place in Gramsci's conception of society and of the political struggle. They are, in fact, two elements of civil society, opposed both to the structure inasmuch as it represents a superstructural moment, and to the negative moment of the force-state inasmuch as it represents a positive moment of the superstructure. Party and hegemony – along with the theme of the intellectuals which is connected to both – are the two major themes of the *Prison Notebooks* and, at the same time, they are the ones which allow a comparison between Gramsci and Lenin.

During the elaboration of the concept of hegemony, which Gramsci carried out in his reflections from prison, he frequently paid homage to Lenin, whom he saw as a theorist of hegemony.⁴⁴ But he does not realise generally that the term 'hegemony' does not belong to Lenin's usual language, while it is a characteristic of Stalin's who, if we can say so, has virtually sanctified it. Lenin preferred to speak of *leadership* (*rukovodstvo*) and of *leader* (*rukovoditel*). In one of his rare passages where the term *holder of hegemony* (*gegemon*) appears, it is clearly used as a synonym for leader.⁴⁵ The term 'hegemony' and the words that have derived from it, appeared quite late in Gramsci's language too, in the two works of 1926 (in *Letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet*

Communist Party and in the unfinished essay 'Alcuni temi della Questione Meridionale'),⁴⁶ that is in his last works before the *Prison Notebooks*. On the contrary, it is used very seldom in the works which are directly inspired by Lenin, that is in the ones from 1917 to 1924.⁴⁷

However, what we are mostly interested in is the conceptual problem and not the linguistic one. From the conceptual point of view, the same term 'hegemony' no longer has in the *Prison Notebooks* (and in the *Letters*) the same meaning as in the two works of 1926. In these the term is used – and conforms to the prevailing official meaning of the Soviet texts – to indicate the alliance between the workers and the peasants, that is with the meaning of *political leadership*,⁴⁸ while in the former texts it also generally acquires the meaning of 'cultural leadership'.⁴⁹ It is with this change of meaning that the originality of Gramsci's thought lies. This change has been generally and erroneously neglected, so that now, in spite of the homage paid by Gramsci to Lenin as the theorist of hegemony in the present day debate over marxism, it is not Lenin who is the pre-eminent theorist of hegemony, but it is Gramsci himself. Schematically, the change took place through an inadvertent and yet important distinction between a narrower meaning, where hegemony means *political leadership* (this is the meaning one finds in Gramsci's works of 1926, and it also prevailed in the tradition of Soviet marxism), as well as a wider meaning, according to which it also means *cultural leadership*. I have said 'also', because in the *Prison Notebooks* the second meaning does not exclude, but it includes and integrates the first one. In the opening pages, which are dedicated to the modern Prince (heading the *Notes on Machiavelli*), Gramsci proposes two fundamental themes for studying the modern party: one on the formation of the 'collective will' (which is the theme of political leadership), and the other on 'moral and intellectual reform' (which is the theme of cultural leadership).⁵⁰ I insist on these two different meanings of hegemony because, in my opinion, a comparison between Lenin and the official leninism on the one side, and of Gramsci on the other, can lead to a profitable result only if we understand that the concept of hegemony, in the passage from one author to the other, has become wider, so that it includes the moment of cultural leadership. And it is also necessary to recognise that by 'cultural leadership' Gramsci means the introduction of a 'reform', in the *strong* meaning which this term has when it refers to a transformation of customs and culture, in opposition to the *weak* meaning which the term has acquired in the political use (the same as the difference between 'reformer' and 'reformist').

We could say that in Lenin the meaning of political leadership prevails, while in Gramsci the one of cultural leadership does; but we should add that this prevalence has two different aspects:

- a For Gramsci, the moment of force is instrumental, and therefore subordinated to the moment of hegemony, while for Lenin, in the works he wrote during the Revolution, dictatorship and hegemony proceed together, and anyhow the moment of force is the primary and decisive one.
- b For Gramsci, the conquest of hegemony precedes the conquest of power, while for Lenin the former accompanies the latter, or at least follows it.⁵¹

But, even though these two differences are important and based on their texts, they are not essential. They can both be explained by the great diversity of the historical situations in which the two theories were elaborated: Lenin's theory, during the struggle; and Gramsci's theory, during the retreat after the defeat. The essential difference, in my opinion, is another: it is not a difference of more or less, before or after, but it is a qualitative difference. I mean that the difference does not lie in the relation between the moments of hegemony and dictatorship, but – independently from the different conception of this relation, which can be explained historically – it lies in the *extension*, and therefore in the *function* of this concept in the two systems respectively. As regards the extension, Gramsci's hegemony includes, as we have seen, both the moment of political leadership and the moment of cultural leadership. Therefore it embraces, as its own bearers, not only the party, but all the other institutions of civil society (in Gramsci's meaning of the term) which have some connection with the elaboration and diffusion of culture.⁵² As regards the function, hegemony not only aims at the formation of a collective will, capable of creating a new state apparatus and of transforming society, but it also aims at elaborating and propagating a new conception of the world. In short, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is not only connected to a theory of the party and of the state, or to a new conception of the party and of the state, and it not only aims at political education, but it also includes, in all its forms, the new and wider conception of civil society understood as a superstructural primary moment.

This clarifies the importance of civil society in Gramsci's system. The resolute function which Gramsci sees in hegemony *vis-à-vis* mere domination, reveals the pre-eminent position of civil society, which is

the mediating moment between the structure and the secondary superstructural moment. Hegemony is the moment of junction between determinate objective conditions and the actual domination of a leading group: this junction comes about *in* civil society. As we have seen, in Gramsci only, and not in Marx, this moment of junction has an autonomous space in the system, for it is placed in civil society. So, in the same way, in Gramsci only, and not in Lenin, the moment of hegemony, which is widened to occupy the autonomous space of civil society, acquires a new dimension and a broader content.⁵³

7 Civil society and the end of the state

The end of the state is the last of Gramsci's themes where the concept of civil society has a primary role. The withering away of the state in a society without class divisions is a constant theme in the works which Lenin wrote during the Revolution and, at the same time, it is an ideal borderline of orthodox marxism. In the *Prison Notebooks*, which were written when the new state had already been solidly founded, this theme does appear, but only in a marginal way. In most of the rare passages which mention the end of the state, it is conceived as a 'reabsorption of political society in civil society'⁵⁴ The society without a state, which Gramsci calls 'regulated society' comes from the enlarging of civil society and, therefore, of the moment of hegemony, until it eliminates all the space which is occupied by political society. The states which have existed until now are a dialectical unity of civil society and political society, of hegemony and dominion. The social class, which will succeed in making its own hegemony so universal that the moment of coercion will become superfluous, will have achieved the conditions for the transition to a regulated society. In one of the passages mentioned, 'regulated society' is even used as synonymous of civil society (and also of ethical state),⁵⁵ that is as civil society freed from political society. Even if it is only a matter of a different *stress* and not of *contrast*, we could say that in the theory of Marx and Engels, which was received and divulged by Lenin, the movement which leads to the withering away of the state is essentially a structural one (supersession of the antagonism between classes until the classes themselves are suppressed), while in Gramsci it is principally a superstructural process (enlargement of civil society until its universalisation). In Marx and Engels, the two terms of the antithesis are: society *with* classes/society *without* classes; in Gramsci they are civil society *with* political society/civil society *without* political society.

The fact (which I have often repeated) that civil society is a mediating element between the structure and the negative moment of the superstructure, brings an important consequence as regards the dialectical process which leads to the withering away of the state: where the terms are only two, that is civil society-state, the final moment (that is the society without classes) is the third term of the dialectical process i.e. the negation of the negation; where the terms are already three, the final moment is attained by a strengthening of the intermediate term. It is significant that Gramsci does not speak of *supersession* (or of suppression), but of *reabsorption*.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as I have already said, the first thoughts about the Industrial Revolution led to an inverted conception of the relation between society and state. It is a cliché that, in the works of the philosophers of natural law, the theory of the state is directly influenced by a pessimistic or optimistic conception of the state of nature; whoever considers the state of nature as evil, sees the state as an innovation; whoever considers the state of nature as fundamentally good, sees the state more as a restoration. This interpretative scheme can be applied to the political writers of the nineteenth century, who invert the relation society-state by seeing, concretely, the pre-state society in the industrial (bourgeois) society. There are some, like Saint-Simon, who move from an optimistic conception of industrial (bourgeois) society; and others like Marx, who move from a pessimistic conception. For the first group, the withering away of the state will be a natural and peaceful consequence of the development of the society of producers; for the others, an absolute reversal will be necessary, and society without the state will be the effect of a true and real qualitative change. Saint-Simon's scheme of evolution foresees the transition from a military society to an industrial one; Marx's scheme, on the other hand, foresees the transition from capitalistic (industrial) society to socialist (industrial) society.

Gramsci's scheme is undoubtedly the second one of the two mentioned above. But, in Gramsci's scheme, civil society comes in as a third term, after its identification, no longer with the state of nature, nor with industrial society, nor generally with pre-state society, but with the moment of hegemony, that is with one of the two moments of the superstructure (the moment of consent as opposed to the moment of force). This introduction seems to draw Gramsci's scheme nearer to the first of the two mentioned above, because in the first scheme the state disappears following the withering away of civil society, that is through a process which is of reabsorption rather than of supersession. Yet, the

different meaning which Gramsci gives to civil society prevents us from interpreting it rather too simply. Against the tradition which expressed the old antithesis state of nature—civil state into the antithesis civil society—state, Gramsci expresses another great historical antithesis, that is the one between the church (broadly speaking, the modern church is the party) and the state, into the antithesis civil society—political society. So when Gramsci speaks of the absorption of political society in civil society, he does not intend to refer to the whole historical process, but only to the process which takes place within the superstructure, which, in turn and in the last instance is conditioned by changes in the structure. So, it is absorption of political society in civil society, but also at the same time, transformation of the economic structure, which is dialectically connected to the transformation of civil society.

In this case too, for an articulated interpretation of Gramsci's conceptual system, it is necessary to understand that 'civil society' is one of the two terms, not of only one antithesis, but of two different antitheses, which are interwoven and which only partially overlap. If we look at civil society as the close of the structure—superstructure antithesis, the end of the state is the overcoming of the superstructural moment in which civil society and political society are in reciprocal equilibrium; if we look at civil society as a moment of the superstructure, the end of the state is a reabsorption of political society in civil society. The apparent ambiguity is due to the real complexity of the historical bloc, as Gramsci conceived it. That is, it is due to the fact that civil society is a constitutive moment of two different processes, which happen interdependently but without overlapping: the process which moves from the structure to the superstructure, and the one which takes place within the superstructure itself. The new historical bloc will be the one where this ambiguity as well will be resolved by the elimination of dualism in the superstructural sphere. In Gramsci's thought, the end of the state consists precisely in this elimination.

Notes

This chapter was originally published in *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea: Atti del Convegno Internazionale Qi Studi Gramsciani*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1968. It was translated into English by Carroll Mortera. The text which is now being published only differs from the one presented at the Congress of Cagliari in that it has had a few formal corrections. I particularly wanted to clarify or strengthen several sentences from which some critics, especially Jacques Texier, had understood that my intention was to see Gramsci as an anti-Marx. I stress, however, that the content has remained the same.

- 1 For more details refer to my essay, 'Hegel e il giusnaturalismo', *Rivista di filosofia*, 57, 1966, p. 397
- 2 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', *Marx and Engels, Collected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, vol. 3, p. 63.
- 3 See for example the chapter 'L'Organisateur' in *Oeuvres de Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon*, Paris, Editions Anthropos, 1966, vol. 2, pp. 17 ff. English translation in *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon*, ed. G. Ionescu, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 138-42.
- 4 Karl Marx, *Capital*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1970, vol. 1, p. 703.
- 5 *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* (3 vols.), Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 110-11.
- 6 F. Engels, 'On the History of the Communist League', *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 178.
- 7 K. Marx, *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 503.
- 8 In *Metaphysik der Sitten, bürgerliche Gesellschaft* stands for *status civilis*, that is for state in the traditional meaning of the word. English translation in I. Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, trans. J. Ladd, New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1964, p. 75.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-7.
- 10 A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, London, 1920, p. 249.
- 11 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Knox, Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 123-4
- 12 'The perfected political state is by its nature the *species-life* of man in *opposition* to his material life. All the presuppositions of this egoistic life continue to exist *outside* the sphere of the state in *civil society*, but as qualities of civil society' (K. Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books in association with *New Left Review*, 1975, p. 220.) See also 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)', *Early Writings*, p. 369, 'Society, as it appears to the political economist, is *civil society*.'
- 13 F. Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy', Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 369.
- 14 'The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.' (*Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 503.)
- 15 *The German Ideology*, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 38, 76.
- 16 For more detailed indications see my article 'Sulla nozione di società civile', *De homine*, nos. 24-5, pp. 19-36.
- 17 In particular, to my knowledge, G. Tamburrano, *Antonio Gramsci*, Manduria, 1963, pp. 220, 223-4.
- 18 *Quarterni del Carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana, Turin, Einaudi, 1975, p. 9. English translation in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Hoare and Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p. 12. There

- are even some extracts where, as is well known, civil society is considered, broadly speaking, as a moment of the state. See also *Lettere dal Carcere*, Turin, Einaudi, 1948, p. 481; *Note sul Machiavelli*, Turin, Einaudi, 1966, p. 130, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 261; *Passato e Presente*, Turin, Einaudi, 1966, p. 72, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 239.
- 19 *Machiavelli*, p. 121, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 170 n.
 - 20 *Passato e Presente*, p. 164.
 - 21 *Machiavelli*, p. 128, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 259.
 - 22 *Ibid.*
 - 23 For a biased interpretation of Hegel, which has already been pointed out by Sichirollo, see the passage on the importance of the intellectuals in Hegel's philosophy (*Quaderni del Carcere*, pp. 46-7).
 - 24 G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts*, para. 308, English translation *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, op. cit.
 - 25 *Passato e Presente*, p. 164.
 - 26 Hegel, op. cit., para. 255.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, para. 265.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, para. 256, which states that it is through the corporation that 'the transit from the sphere of civil society into the State takes place'
 - 29 K. Marx, *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 503.
 - 30 *Studi Gramsciani*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, Istituto Gramsci, 1958, pp. 280-1
 - 31 *Ibid.*, p. 281.
 - 32 *Il Materialismo Storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, Turin, Einaudi, 1948, p. 40, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 366.
 - 33 'The structure is actually the real past, because it is the testimony, the indisputable document of what has been done and continues to exist as a condition of the present and of what is to come' (*Il Materialismo Storico*, p. 222).
 - 34 *Ibid.*, p. 40, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 367.
 - 35 For an interpretation and a criticism of fatalism, see *Passato e Presente*, p. 203.
 - 36 Tamburrano has pointed out to me that, as regards the relation between civil society and state, it is more a matter of distinction, rather than of antithesis. This remark is a sharp one. But I am tempted to answer that it is a characteristic of dialectic thought to resolve the distinctions into antitheses, so that one can then proceed to overcome them.
 - 37 *Machiavelli*, p. 121, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 170 n.
 - 38 *Lettere dal Carcere*, Turin, Einaudi, 1948, p. 481.
 - 39 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.' Immediately afterwards he gives the example of the doctrine of the division of powers as an ideological reflection of a society where power is truly, that is in reality, divided (see *The German Ideology*, *Selected Works*, p. 47).
 - 40 A. Labriola, *Saggi sul materialismo storico*, Rome, 1964, pp. 136-7.

- 41 *Passato e Presente*, p. 38, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 276.
- 42 Machiavelli, pp. 150–1.
- 43 *Passato e Presente*, p. 38, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 268.
- 44 *Il Materialismo Storico*, pp. 32, 39, 75, 189, 201, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 55–6 n, 357, 365, 381–2, 381 n; *Lettere dal Carcere*, p. 616.
- 45 'As the only completely revolutionary class of contemporary society, it (the proletariat) must be the leader (*rukovoditel*), the holder of hegemony (*gegemonon*) in the struggle of all workers and all the exploited against the oppressors and the exploiters. The proletariat is revolutionary inasmuch as it is conscious of this idea of hegemony (*etu ideu gegemonii*) and inasmuch as it puts it into practice' (I I, p. 349). I am grateful for this and other linguistic information in the paragraph, to the kindness of Vittorio Strada. The only extract from Lenin which, to my knowledge, has been quoted by the scholars of Gramsci and where the term 'holder of hegemony' should appear is *Due tattiche della social-democrazia nella rivoluzione democratica*, in *Opere Scelte*, Rome, 1965, p. 319; see the Preface to *Due mila pagine di Gramsci*, ed. G. Perrata and N. Gallo, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1964, vol. 1, p. 96, the term which Lenin actually used is not 'holder of hegemony' but 'leader' (*rukovoditel*). For Stalin's language, see *Dal colloquio con la prima delegazione operaia americana*, where, when enumerating the themes upon which Lenin had developed Marx's doctrine, he says: 'In the fourth place, the theme of the hegemony of the proletariat in the revolution, etc.' (J. U. Stalin, *Opere Scelte*, Moscow, 1947, vol. 1, p. 35).
- 46 *Due mila pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1, p. 799 and pp. 824–5.
- 47 Ferrata recalls the article 'La Russia Potenza Mondiale', 14 August 1920, where we can find the expression 'hegemonic capitalism' (*L'Ordine Nuovo (1919–20)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1954, pp. 145–6). Ragionieri pointed out that the term 'hegemony' is used also in one of Gramsci's works written in 1924.
- 48 'It is the principle and practice of hegemony of the proletariat that are brought into question; the fundamental relations of the alliance between workers and peasants that are disturbed and placed in danger' (*Due mila pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1, p. 824); 'The proletariat can become the leading and dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances, etc.' (*Due mila pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1, p. 799). English translations in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1921–26*, trans. and ed. Q. Hoare, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1978, pp. 431, 443 respectively.
- 49 *Lettere dal Carcere*, p. 616: 'The moment of hegemony or of cultural leadership'. Also 'intellectual and moral leadership' (*Il Risorgimento*, Turin, Einaudi, 1949, p. 70, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 59).
- 50 Machiavelli, pp. 6–8.
- 51 I am referring to the well-known extracts where Gramsci explains the success of the politics of the moderates during the Risorgimento (*Il Risorgimento*, pp. 70–2). For Lenin, the passage from the *Political Report* at the Eleventh Congress of the Party (1922) is very important, the one where he complains about the inferiority of communist culture compared to that of the opponents: 'If the conquerors have a higher cultural level than that of

the defeated, they impose their own culture on them; if the contrary is true, the defeated ones impose their own culture onto the conquerors' (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1966, p. 262).

- 52 *Lettere dal Carcere*, p. 481, where he speaks of 'hegemony of a social group over the whole of national society, which is carried out through the so-called private organisms, such as the church, the trade unions, the schools, etc.'
- 53 We can find two decisive proofs of this new dimension and of this broader subject in the way in which Gramsci deals with the problem of the active subjects of hegemony (the intellectuals), and in the way he understands the content of the new hegemony (the theme of the 'nation-popular'). But because these are two very broad subjects, I will keep to these two observations only:
- a) Gramsci is certainly inspired by Lenin in his reflections on the new intellectual, who must be identified with the leader of the party. Still, as regards the problem of the intellectuals, his thought cannot be understood if we miss its connection with the discussion on the function of the intellectuals, which began very dramatically in about the 1930s, during the years of the great political and economic crisis (Benda, 1927; Mannheim, 1929; Ortega, 1930), even if Gramsci's constant interlocutor is Benedetto Croce alone.
- b) With the reflection on the 'nation-popular', a characteristic subject of the historiography of opposition of the anti-history of Italy, Gramsci connects the problem of social revolution with the problem of Italian revolution. The problem of the intellectual and moral reform accompanies the reflections on the history of Italy, from the Renaissance to the Risorgimento, and it has as its first interlocutors mainly Machiavelli, as regards the first problem, and Gioberti (the importance of whose research on Gramsci's sources has only been stressed by Asor Rosa) as regards the second problem.
- 54 *Machiavelli*, pp. 94, 130, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 253, 261. In *Il Materialismo Storico*, p. 75, he only speaks of the 'disappearance of political society' and of the 'coming of a regulated society' In a different way, in *Lettere dal Carcere*, p. 160, the party is described as 'the instrument for the transition from civil-political society to "regulated society"', because it absorbs both in order to overcome them.
- 55 *Machiavelli*, p. 132, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 263.