Lecture Five

Antonio Gramsci(1891-1937) and “the Philosophy of Praxis”

(Western Marxism, Spring, 2012 )

**One, Antonio Gramsci and His Prison Notebooks**

1, life and works

1908, Cagliari, “Sardinian nationalism”, “southernism”(the problem of peasants)

1911, Durin,

The university of Durin: “the philosophy of praxis” (Antonio Labriola)

The worker’s movement: the problem of organization

1917, October Revolution, the workers’ council movement in Durin

1921, joining the Italian Communist Party

1921-1926, the struggles within the Communist Party and the problem of Fascism

1926-1937, life in prisons

1929-1937, writing the notebooks (2848 pages, politics, history, philosophy, culture)

The reflections on the revolutionary experience (the problem of southernism, the problem of organization, the problem of fascism, the politics of the subaltern group, intellectuals, hegemony, the philosophy of praxis)

The countenance within suffering:

Not the ploughman, but the manure : “Image of Prometheus, who, instead of being attacked by the eagle, is devoured by parasites. The Hebrews produced the image of Job. Only the Greeks could have imagined Prometheus, but the Hebrews were more realistic, more pitiless, and their hero more true to life.”

**Two, the Problem of “the Intellectuals”**

**1, Revolution and the problem of “the intellectuals”**

The mass: p326-327

The contrast between thought and action,

not just self-deception, but the contrast of a social-political order,

when acting as an organic totality, they are independent and autonomous, but in “normal times” only submissive and subordinate,

not yet have their own conception of the world (only embryonic)

the so-called revolutionary intellectuals: have not inherited the spirit of “the philosophy of praxis”

Antonio Labriola and “the philosophy of praxis” (the unique nexus between theoretical and practical activity, the unity of philosophy and history, the primacy of concrete relations over consciousness, the Hegelian Marxism)

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“pure” intellectuals: have absorbed elements of “the philosophy of praxis” into the idealist currents;

The intellectuals who are more closely connected with the mass: have replaced “the philosophy of praxis” with the materialist philosophy (have betrayed the spirit of the philosophy of praxis).

The reason:

Catholic church and the unity of faith (to keep the unity of intellectuals and mass by forbidding independent intellectual activities)

The history of the separation between intellectuals and mass in the modern Europe (renaissance, the reformation, the idealist philosophy)

The orthodoxy intellectuals: adaptation to the common sense of the mass (the ideology of the subaltern group)

**2, the Organic intellectuals and the Traditional Intellectuals**

P5, **organic intellectuals**: homogeneity and universality of the social group (“organizer of society in general”)

“Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one of more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.”

Aristocracy: have its own organic intellectuals

The capitalist entrepreneurs: have its own organic intellectuals

The peasants: not have its own organic intellectuals

P6-7, **traditional intellectuals**: an independent category (represents the historical continuity); in the final analysis, they are also the organic intellectuals

“However, every ‘essential’ social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as expression of a development of this structure, has found (at least in all of the history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms.”

Reasons for this: the ecclesiastics:P7

“Since these various categories of intellectuals experience through an ‘espirit de corps’ their uninterrupted historical continuity and their special qualification, they thus put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group. ”

**The criterion** to differentiate the intellectuals from other social group: P8 THE FUCTION IN SOCIETY

“the most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations.”

The emergence of any dominant social group:

To assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals

To elaborate its own organic intellectuals

**3, intellectuals and the political hegemony**

**A, the new theory of superstructure: civil society and the state**

P12“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 dominance’ or command exercised through the state and the ‘juridical’ government. ”

The structural base

**Superstructure (civil society, the state), intellectuals: functionaries of superstructure; the expansion of the category of intellectuals in the modern world**

**Civil society: hegemony**

“the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general condition imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige (and the consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because its position and function in the world of production ”

**The state: direct dominance**

“The apparatus of state coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.”

**4, the dialectic Between the intellectuals and the mass**

**A, the dialectic of mass and intellectual: the antithesis of the Catholic.**

P331the church: “…only by imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals so that they do not exceed certain limits of differentiation and so render the split catastrophic and irreparable.”

P333 “The position of the philosophy of praxis is the antithesis of the Catholic. The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the ‘simple’ in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life. If it affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the level of the masses, but precisely to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups.”

B, from the subaltern group to the intellectual-moral bloc, How? **A struggle of political hegemonies:**

*One,* the separation of theory and practice (or the contradictory consciousness)

*Two,* feeling being different (independent): “consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force(that is, political consciousness)”

*Three,* progressive self-consciousness (a real possession of a single and coherent conception of the world); the unity of theory and practice

*Four,* historically, it means the create of an elite of intellectuals

P 334“Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an elite of intellectuals. A human ‘mass’ does not distinguish itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is, without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people ‘specialised’ in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas”

***Five,* the parties and the dialectic between the intellectuals and the mass**

The dialectics between the intellectuals and the mass:

P 334-335 “the intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of ‘the simple’, who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialized intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance.”

PARTIES:

P335 “For this reason, one can say that the parties are the elaborators of new integral and totalitarian intelligentsias and the crucibles where the unification of theory and practice, understood as a real historical process, takes place.”

PARTIES: elaborators of the elite intellectuals, the clear conception, a precise and decisive will

Three, the Theory of Hegemony

1, “civil society” and hegemony

2, Lenin and the problem of hegemony

October revolution: “the Revolution against Das Capital” (revolutionary will versus the determinism)

**Four, “the Philosophy of Praxis”**

**1, the criticism of simple materialism**

**2, the criticism of speculative idealism**

**3, the philosophy of hostoricism**