

## Immanence

A: al-bāṭinī. – F: immanence. – G: Immanenz.  
R: immanentnost'. – S: imanencia. – C: neizaixing  
内在性

The word ‘immanence’ derives from the Latin *in/manere* [remaining within]. Its specific meaning within the Marxist tradition as ‘absolute this-sidedness [*absoluter Diesseitigkeit/terrestrität assoluta*]’ was developed by Antonio **Gramsci**, following upon **Marx’s** *Theses on Feuerbach*, in a critical confrontation with the speculative concept of immanence of Benedetto **Croce** and **Bukharin’s** conception of the philosophical foundation of Marx’s work as a variant of metaphysical materialism. **Gramsci** attempted to specify a qualitatively new concept of immanence in the philosophy of praxis within the problematic of speculative immanence *versus* historicist or realistic immanence (Q 10II, §9). Central for the development of these researches was an analysis of the historicity of language and the critique of political economy, and, above all, the translation of, and profound meditation upon, **Marx’s** call in the second thesis on **Feuerbach** for a practice of thought capable of demonstrating ‘its reality [*Wirklichkeit*] and power [*Macht*], its this-sidedness [*Diesseitigkeit*]’ (*MECW* 5, 3). Immanence thus comes to mean an absolute ‘being-within-history [*Innergeschichtlichkeit*]’ and the mediation of praxis [*Praxisvermitteltheit*], a break with the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism.

1. Although **Bukharin’s** *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* only indirectly refers to the concept of immanence (in the chapter title ‘Teleology in General and its Critique. Immanent Teleology’ (13–18)), **Gramsci’s** research for a new concept of immanence was initially provoked by the claim in that work that ‘formulations’ in the works of **Marx** and **Engels** ‘which *externally* appear to correspond to a teleological standpoint’ should be understood as merely a ‘metaphoric’ mode of expres-

sion (18). In the early phases of his research, **Gramsci** argued that **Marx** gave ‘his own meaning to the term “immanence”’ (Q 4, §11) ‘on the concrete terrain of history’ (Q 4, §17) qualitatively different from the speculative, metaphysical meaning of the pre-Marxian concept. Exceptions are the concepts of immanence of Giordano **Bruno**, who **Gramsci** twice – in the early phases of his research, problematically; in the later phases, positively – signalled as a possible indirect source of **Marx’s** new concept (Q 4, §17; Q 11, §28), and that of **Machiavelli** (Q 5, §127). In a note written in the same period (1930) in which **Gramsci** translated **Marx’s** *Theses on Feuerbach*, he posited the perspective which motivated his subsequent researches and which he sought to specify: ‘The expression “immanence” has an exact meaning in Marx’s work, and it is necessary to define it: taken exactly, this definition would actually be “theory”’ (Q 4, §17; Cf. Q 11, §28).

Drawing upon his university formation in linguistics (cf. **Lo Piparo**), **Gramsci** continually returned to interrogate the linguistic presuppositions of **Bukharin’s** claim (Q 4, §11, C-text Q 11, §27; Q 4, §17, C-text Q 11, §28; Q 7, §36; Q 8, §171; Q 4, §34; Q 11, §16). Against **Bukharin’s** dismissive use of the adjective ‘metaphoric’, **Gramsci** sketched out an historicist theory of language in which the metaphor is read as both a linguistic symptom of historical transformations of the forms of intellectual and social praxis, and, crucially, as a location of class struggle and the practice of hegemony (both between classes within nations and between nations internationally): ‘Language is in fact always metaphorical.... Language changes with the transformation of the entire civilisation, through the emergence of new classes in the culture, through the hegemony exercised by one national language on others etc, and takes up precisely metaphorical words of previous civilisations and cultures... the new “metaphorical” meaning is diffused with the diffusion of the new culture

which in addition also creates brand-new words or borrows them from other languages with a precise meaning, that is, without the extensive meaning that they had in the original languages' (Q 11, §24, A-text Q 7, §36). The old term of 'immanence' remained, 'presupposed as an element in the thought-process from which the new [concept] historically emerged', but 'the use is metaphorical' because it occurs in a new culture and *Konstellation* of meaning. The new meaning developed by the philosophy of praxis, which remained to be specified and which corresponded to the new practices, 'lies hidden under the metaphor' (Q 11, §28).

2. Similar to the emergence of the concept of 'absolute historicism' (with which the concept of immanence has an integral connection throughout the research project of the *Prison Notebooks*, particularly in (Q 8, §204) the first appearance of the term 'absolute historicism'), **Gramsci's** attempt to specify the philosophy of praxis's new notion of immanence underwent a sharpening of focus when it passed through the medium of his simultaneous critique of the 'secular Pope' Benedetto **Croce** (Q 8, §235; Q 10II, §4). Just as **Gramsci** rejected **Croce's** claim to have produced genuinely 'historicist' philosophical and historiographical systems (Q 8, §224), so he also considered **Croce's** use of the concept of immanence (central to his entire thought, on both historiographical and philosophical terrains) to remain trapped within a problematic of 'speculation' which had determined the pre-Marxian concept (cf. Q 11, §53, in which **Gramsci** defines 'speculative' theoretical practice as a function of the consolidation and disintegration of a social class's hegemony). The 'immanence' of **Croce's** historiography, according to **Gramsci**, was contradicted by the notion of a liberal 'religion of freedom' that determined modernity, despite all evidence (such as fascist reaction) to the contrary: a speculative 'ably disguised form of history according to a plan [*storia a disegno*]' (Q 10II, §41xvi). His attempted purification of **Hegel's** thought of 'every left-over of theology and metaphysics' (Q 8, §224) was compromised

both by the unbridgeable distinction between the theoretical (art and philosophy) and practical (economic and moral) forms in which Spirit synchronically articulated itself in the Crocean system, and by **Croce's** consequent attempt to establish a qualitative distinction between philosophy (understood as a disinterested search for truth) and ideologies (understood as having a merely instrumental value) (Q 10II, §2). In the Crocean *Weltanschauung*, the categories of thought remained uncompromised by the historical realities they contemplate (*Etica e Politica*; cf. **Frosini** 127; **Spiegel** 43–6).

The weakness and contradictions of **Croce's** concept of immanence was further indirectly highlighted by **Gramsci's** reflections on 'one of the greatest weaknesses of the philosophies of immanence' (Q 11, §12) particularly those of the Renaissance (to whom **Croce**, in his Olympian reserve, bore a decisive resemblance (Q 10I, §6). 'They have not understood how to build an ideological unity between the lower and higher orders, between the "simple people" and the intellectuals' (Q 11, §12). This weakness, particularly noticeable in the failure of previous philosophies of immanence (and in **Croce's** own political and pedagogical activity) to articulate an alternative pedagogical programme which could replace the formative role of religious instruction in the education of children (Q 11, §12), was precisely that which the philosophy of praxis's 'dialectical-pedagogic' relation to 'common sense [*sensu comune*]', sublation of the speculative notion of immanence and its related redefinition of the notion of theory aimed to overcome.

3. The early months of 1932 witnessed the integration of an important new theme into **Gramsci's** researches, particularly in the note 'Introduction to the study of philosophy. Speculative immanence and historical and realistic immanence' (Q 10II, §9), which announced the search for a concrete theoretical precursor for the new concept of immanence (cf. **Thomas** 2008). 'It is affirmed that the philosophy of praxis was born on the terrain of the highest developments of the culture of the first half of the nineteenth century,

a culture represented by classical German philosophy, by classical “English” economy, and by French Literature and political practice. At the origin of the philosophy of praxis are these three cultural moments. But in which sense must we understand this affirmation? That each of these movements has contributed to the elaboration, respectively, of the philosophy, the economics and the politics of the philosophy of praxis? Or that the philosophy of praxis has synthetically elaborated the three movements, that is, the entire culture of the epoch, and that in the new synthesis, in any of its moments which are examined, theoretical, economic, political moment, one can find as a preparatory “moment” each of these three movements? (Q 10II, §9). Directly contradicting the claim that **Gramsci** ‘never concerned himself with economic problems’ (**Anderson** 1976, 75; cf. **Haug** 2006, 67), he confronted the central theme of **Croce**’s multifaceted critique of **Marx**’s economic theory, and in particular his claim that historical materialism remained an essentially teleological theory of transcendent causes in which the ‘Economy’ functioned as a ‘hidden God [*un Dio ascoso*]’, by positing the moment of classical ‘English’ economy as the source of the ‘unitary synthetic moment’ of the ‘new concept of immanence’. ‘In a certain sense it seems to me possible to say that the philosophy of praxis = Hegel + David Ricardo. The problem is to be presented initially in the following way: the new methodological canons introduced by Ricardo into economic science are to be considered as merely instrumental values (by understanding them as a new chapter of formal logic) or have they had a significance of philosophical innovation?’ (Q 10II, §9). ‘Do they [the Ricardian formulation of concepts of “tendential laws” and “determinate market”] not imply precisely a new “immanence”, a new conception of “necessity” and of freedom etc?’ (Q 10II, §9; cf. **Frosini** 143–9).

**Gramsci**’s tentative proposal for this research project (which the conditions of incarceration did not allow him to conduct in any detailed, scientific form) has been greeted with both affirmation (cf. **Boothman** 61–4, criticised in **Krätke**, 76–82) and incompre-

hension (in particular, from Piero **Sraffa**, who responded to **Gramsci**’s question in a letter on 21 June 1932 with the observation that **Ricardo** was merely a stockbroker of average education who had never considered the historical determinateness of either his own thought or the society in which he lived (**Sraffa** 74)). Nevertheless, **Gramsci** believed to have detected the theoretical possibility for the method of concept formation that had allowed **Marx** to break definitively with the speculative philosophical tradition in the concept of ‘tendential laws’, understood not as “laws” in a naturalistic sense... or in that of “speculative determinism”, but in ‘an “historical” sense’ (Q 10II, §9), laws which have validity within determinate and historically limited social formations or determinate markets. “Determinate market” is therefore the same as saying “determinate relation of social forces in a determinate structure of the productive apparatus”, a relation guaranteed (that is, rendered permanent) by a determinate political, moral and juridical superstructure’ (Q 11, §52; cf. Q 8, §128). According to **Gramsci**, the translation into historical and realistic terms of **Ricardo**’s ‘mode of thinking and of intuiting’ and the ‘method of ‘assuming that...’ (Q 11, §52; cf. **Boothman** 62; **Krätke** 78), permitted **Marx** to produce concrete abstractions which were immanent to, and able to grasp the specificity of, ‘historical facts’ (Q 11, §52) within determinant ‘historical blocks’, and not, as occurred in the degeneration of the Ricardian determinate market into an ahistorical abstraction (Q 10II, §9) and as **Croce** asserted, to produce transcendent and ahistorical metaphysical laws.

Whether **Marx** discusses the opposition immanent to the commodity of use-value and value (*MECW* 35, 113 et sq.), the ‘immanent drive and constant tendency of capital to raise the productivity of labour’ (*MECW* 35, 325 et sq.; trans. modified), the ‘immanent contradiction’ of the application of machinery for the production of surplus-value (*MECW* 35, 408 et sq.), the determination of the profit rate ‘immanent to the capitalist mode of production’ (*MECW* 37, 355) or the ‘immanent fetter and barrier to production’, which the

‘valorisation of capital based on the contradictory character of capitalist production’ (MECW 37, 438; trans. modified) ultimately constitutes – in all cases it is a matter of outlining tendencies, determinations and contradictions that are immanent to a mode of production founded upon capital. Universalising the theoretical presuppositions of what **Gramsci** understood as **Ricardo**’s method, ‘by extending them adequately to [take account of] all of history’ (Q 10II, §9) – that is, beyond the terrain of political economy on which they emerged – **Marx** established the possibility for the working out of a new concept of immanence as the ‘unitary synthetic moment’ which allows the transformation of the three pre-Marxian movements of classical German philosophy, French politics and classical ‘English’ economy into theoretical moments, in relations of continual translation, of the philosophy of praxis (Q 10II, §9).

4. **Gramsci**’s historical-materialist radicalisation of the concept of immanence leads to the ‘deconstruction’ of the question regarding the relation of consciousness to the external world in a way that takes up again **Marx**’s central perspective of praxis, in opposition to the chief currents of Marxism at the time. Immanence as active being-in-the-world allows the ‘external world’ standing over against an ‘inner world’ to be comprehended ‘as an historically conditioned thought form . . . which is historically mediated and suppresses real mediations’ (**Haug** 1996, 48). If ‘praxis’ is analysed in a way ‘that fragments it, pluralises it, overturns its thought from the inner towards the outer, leaving humans active in the ensemble of social relations and keeping this ensemble of social relations alive in their activities, just as the fire of labour for **Marx** reanimates and refreshes the “dead labour” in the form of the means of production, then we can come to the following conclusion: “Praxis is the alternative to the immanence of consciousness with the transcendence of the external world, in praxis there is an organic connection of thought and being, efficacy [*Wirken*] and reality [*Wirklichkeit*]” (ibid.). **Gramsci** ascribes the naïve idea of an external world or any idea of an ‘extra-

historical and extra-human objectivity’ to sedimented beliefs in divine creation (Q 11, §17). Here the idea of immanence flows into the insight that ‘objective’ always means “humanly objective”, which can be held to correspond exactly to ‘historically subjective’; in other words, objective would mean ‘universal subjective’ (ibid.).

5. The final and most significant element of this research, however, occurred when **Gramsci** brought the insights gained on the terrain of the critique of political economy into relation with his meditations on the *Theses on Feuerbach*, returning to his initial equation of the new concept of ‘immanence’ with ‘theory’. Objecting to **Croce**’s interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as a rejection of all forms of philosophy and its replacement with practical activity, **Gramsci** argued that it was ‘much more the case, in the face of the “scholastic”, purely theoretical or contemplative philosophy, of the revindication of a philosophy that produces a corresponding morality, a realising will and that, in the last instance, identifies itself with these’ – that is, of the revindication of a philosophy of praxis, as urged by **Labriola** (and which **Croce** himself had previously admitted was justified (Q 10II, §31)) which would contribute to the working-class movement’s attempt to construct a political hegemony.

The concept of the unity of theory and praxis of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the closing line of *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German philosophy* (“The German working class movement is the inheritor of classical German philosophy”), **Gramsci** argued, uniting the vocabulary of his economical research with that which he had used to translate the *Theses on Feuerbach* at the beginning of his incarceration, ‘is nothing other than the affirmation of the historicity of philosophy in the terms of an absolute immanence, of a “*terrestrià assoluta*” (Q 10II, §31). According to this new concept of immanence, theory is no longer to be understood as external to a practice to which it must be applied. Rather, in realistic and historical terms, theory itself is to be understood as a determinate activity alongside other activities with its own specific tasks

to fulfill, a theoretical ‘moment’ immanent to the social practices from which it emerges, which it seeks to comprehend, and to whose transformation it seeks to contribute: ‘If the problem of producing the identity of theory and praxis is posed, it is posed in this sense: to construct, on the basis of a determinate practice, a theory which, coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the same practice, may accelerate the historical process taking place, rendering practice more homogenous, coherent, efficient in all of its elements, strengthening it to the maximum; or, given a certain theoretical position, to organise the indispensable practical element for setting it to work. The identity of theory and praxis is a critical act, by means of which practice is demonstrated to be rational and necessary or theory to be realistic and rational’ (Q 15, §22). In this sense, **Gramsci’s** insights into **Marx’s** ‘new concept of immanence’ represent only the beginning of a research project that contemporary Marxist theory, after the collapse of the Stalinist mutilation of **Marx’s** theoretical legacy, must urgently recommence.

## Peter Thomas

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(absolute) historicism, classical bourgeois economy, classical German philosophy, critique of political economy, dialectics, ensemble of social relations, historical materialism, the here-after/this world, history, idealism/materialism, ideology theory, *Theses on Feuerbach*, language, law (social), metaphor, metaphysics, objectivism, objectivity, philosophy, philosophy of praxis, political economy, praxis, praxis philosophy, *Prison Notebooks*, Ricardianism, scholasticism, speculation, Spirit, sublation of philosophy, teleology, tendency/tendency law, theory, theory/praxis, transcendence/immanence.

Aufhebung der Philosophie, Dialektik, Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, Feuerbach-Thesen, Gefängnishefte, Geist, Geschichte, Gesetz (soziales), historischer Materialismus, Historizismus (absoluter), Idealismus/Materialismus, Ideologietheorie, Jenseits/Diesseits, klassische bürgerliche Ökonomie, klassische deutsche Philosophie, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Metapher, Metaphysik, Objektivismus, Objektivität, Philosophie, Philosophie der Praxis, politische Ökonomie, Praxis, Praxisphilosophie, Ricardianismus, Scholastik, Spekulation, Sprache, Teleologie, Tendenz/Tendenzgesetz, Theorie, Theorie/Praxis, Transzendenz/Immanenz.