

## Historicism, absolute

A: at-tārīḥīya al-muṭlaqa. –

G: Historizismus, absoluter.

F: historicisme absolu. –

R: absoljutnyi istorizm.

S: historicismo absoluto.

C: jue DUI lishi zhuyi 绝对历史主义

The expression ‘absolute historicism’ appears only three times in the *Prison Notebooks* of Antonio Gramsci. It appears for the first time, as a subject for further investigation, in the first note that Gramsci writes with the title ‘An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’ (Q 8, §204). Its second appearance (perhaps the most well known quotation) is in ‘Concept of “Orthodoxy”’, as a concluding formulation to the important additional passage (note 1) which argues that ‘it has been forgotten that in the case of a very common expression one should put the accent on the first term – “historical” – and not on the second, which is of metaphysical origin. The philosophy of praxis is the absolute “historicism”, the absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history. It is along this line that one must trace the thread of the new conception of the world’ (Q 11, §27; SPN 465). Its third and final appearance is in ‘Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’ (Q 15, §61; SPN 417), in the middle of series of notes dedicated to considering the nature of the Italian Risorgimento and its relationship to the French Revolution. As in Q 11, §27, the expression ‘absolute historicism’ is used as a description of one of the elements of the philosophy of praxis. Although its importance is emphasised, the expression itself is not subject to further explicit analysis or development. It appears like the tip of an iceberg, beneath which lies a conceptual structure and series of analyses and researches that remain largely implicit.

1. ‘Theory of History and of Historiography’ constitutes the first subject of the proposed

study plan that Gramsci writes on the first page of his first notebook on 8 February 1929. In the first notebook with a section dedicated to philosophical questions, entitled ‘Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism’ (Notebook 4), he begins to consider Marxism’s relation to historicism, considered as both a political-ideological formation and philosophical doctrine – a dual sided exploration that Gramsci relates to Hegel’s and Marx’s comments on the relations of translation which obtained between the political practice of the French Revolution and the theoretical developments of German idealism (cf. Q 8, §208). In ‘Two Aspects of Marxism’, he argues that historical materialism can be considered, insofar as it is still undergoing a period of popularisation in the form of a materialism closely connected to the traditional world-views of the subaltern classes, as ‘the popular side of modern historicism’ (Q 4, §3; SPN 396). In ‘The Restoration and Historicism’, he specifies this formulation, arguing that the confrontation of the different ‘historicisms’ that emerged from the experience of the French Revolution and the period of the Restoration produced their *Aufhebung* in the form of a “popular” historicism which criticised the petty bourgeois ideology and the “aristocratic” ideology, explaining both and explaining “itself”, which represented the greatest form of “historicism”, the total liberation from any form of abstract “ideologism”, the real conquest of the historical world, the beginnings of a new, original civilisation. It is necessary’, Gramsci declares, ‘to study all of these current of thought in their concrete manifestations: 1) as a philosophical current; 2) as a historiographical current; 3) as a political current’ (Q 4, §24; cf. Q 16, §9; SPN 399).

The systematic pursuit of this study plan occurs immediately, particularly in the two great philosophical (and at the same time, directly political) confrontations which will occupy Gramsci throughout his incarceration: the critiques of the attempted ‘liquidation’ of Marxism by Benedetto Croce and the

'dilution' of Marxism which **Gramsci** argues is represented in the (emerging diamat orthodoxy) of the *Theory of Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology* of **Bukharin**. 'Absolute historicism' functions as a 'critical concept' in both directions (**Roth** 1972, 66). These two distinct critiques are unified not only by their common motivation to defend and develop **Labriola's** 'thesis that Marxism is an independent and original philosophy', against the 'double revision' to which Marxism had been subjected (Q 4, §3; SPN 390). They are also unified by the dialectical rhythm with which **Gramsci** develops themes in his engagement with one thinker which are then transferred, or 'translated', into the terms of his critique of the other, and vice versa. Thus, although these critiques are developed in tandem, it is nevertheless still possible to detect distinct moments of critical attention in relation to each thinker. Thus, in Notebook 4, **Gramsci's** comments on the theme of historicism are particularly directed against **Bukharin**. In his reduction of the philosophy of Marxism to a version of traditional, eighteenth-century vulgar materialism (which 'can be nothing other than eternal and absolute' (Q 4, §40; SPN 407; cf. Q 4, §25; Q 7, §47)), **Bukharin** does not comprehend, **Gramsci** argues, that 'the essential part of Marxism consists in its sublation [*superamento*] of the old philosophies and also in the way of conceiving philosophy; it is this which must be demonstrated and systematically developed... in the expression "historical materialism" the accent has been placed on the second member, whereas it should be given to the first: Marx is essentially an "historicist"' (Q 4, §11; cf. Q 11, §27; SPN 465). The new way of practising philosophy consists not only in the historicist critique of the metaphysical tradition and the 'theoretical' explanation 'that every "truth" believed to be eternal and absolute has practical origins and has represented or represents a provisional value'. It also consists, equally if not more importantly, in the much more difficult task of making 'this interpretation "practically" comprehensible in relation to historical materialism itself' (Q 4, §40; SPN 406).

The critique of **Croce's** relation to historicism, on the other hand, intensifies in Notebook 8, both in the notes written before the third series of 'Notes on Philosophy', in this section itself, and above all, in the 'special' Notebook 10, which constitutes, in part, the "Anti-Croce" which **Gramsci** intended to write following the example of **Engels's** *Anti-Dühring* (Q 8, §235; SPN 371). **Gramsci** criticises **Croce's** claims of 'a disinterested contemplation of the eternal becoming of human history' (Q 8, §39) and highlights the similarity between the nature of his (historiographical) historicism and those of the traditions of (political-ideological) historicism which emerged during the experience of the Italian Risorgimento, which **Gramsci** suggests can be understood with the concept of 'passive revolution' (Q 8, §39; cf. Q 10.I, §6). Both were committed to an abstract and symmetrical view in which history progresses according to a 'dialectic of preservation and innovation' (Q 8, §27). Doctrines, such as those of the Jacobin moment of modern culture, which proposed not the preservation of elements of the past according to a progressively unfolding preordained plan, but the introduction of new elements and the dislocation of certainties under the pressure of actual historical practice, were declared to be 'irrational'. **Croce's** historicism is argued to be, in a repetition of the historicisms of the Italian Risorgimento, 'not so much scientific theory as practical-political tendency or ideology' (Q 8, §27): a 'speculative, "liberal" Utopia whose fear of mass movements (Q 10.I, §6) banishes revolutionary politics to the irrational and anti-historical, and makes fascist reaction incomprehensible as anything but a temporary aberration in an otherwise pacific evolutionary development. Rather than 'an ethical-political history', **Gramsci** claims that **Croce** has produced 'a speculative history' (Q 8, §240).

At the same time, **Gramsci** pursues his critique of **Croce** on the specifically philosophical terrain, discovering the same contradictions at work in **Croce's** speculative historicism as those that dominated his historiography. Significantly, this engagement occurs after **Gramsci**

has translated the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ in the pages reserved for translations at the beginning of Notebook 7 (according to **Francioni** (38) most probably undertaken at the same time as **Gramsci** writes the first ‘Notes on Philosophy’ in Notebook 4, between May and November 1930) and has begun to develop the notion of the distinctive features of a philosophy of praxis (the term itself appears for the first time in relation to historical materialism and, in particular, the theory and practice of hegemony, in ‘Materialism and Historical Materialism’ (Q 7, §35; cf. **Haug** 1994, 1195 et sq.)). Against **Croce**’s claim to have ‘attempted “to expel” from the field of philosophy every residue of theology and metaphysics to the point of negating any philosophical “system”’, **Gramsci** argues that his thought remains essentially speculative and within the problematic of theology and metaphysics: ‘every claim of “historicism” is empty, because it is a case of speculative “historicism”, of the “concept” of history and not of history’ (Q 8, §224; cf. Q 10.I, §8). Although **Croce** had indeed argued that philosophy progresses by solving problems presented to it by historical development, and not in terms of a closed sphere of thought (Q 10.I, §4), he still wished to maintain a qualitative distinction between philosophy, understood as a disinterested search for truth, and ideologies, which he reduced to mere instruments of political action (Q 10. II, §2). Certainly, for **Croce** also, historical thought is the ‘only and integral form of knowledge’ (1938, 56), which constitutes an absolute historicism in the sense of a unity of philosophy and history. However, he only went ‘half way’, because he ‘takes the categories of Spirit out of this historicity’ (**Roth** 1972, 68).

**Gramsci**, on the other hand, in one of the richest passages of the *Prison Notebooks*, describes the distinction between philosophy and ideology as a quantitative one, related to the level of social, political and historical coherence (in the specific sense this word has for **Gramsci**; cf. **Haug** 1996, 21 et sq., 61) of conceptions of the world. ‘Ideology is any particular conception of groups internal to the class’ which are directed to the resolution of immediate problems. Philosophy, on the other hand,

in the positive sense with which **Gramsci** uses it in this passage, is a conception of the world which tends to raise the level of awareness of historical determination and increase the capacity to act of an entire social class, ‘not only in its current and immediate interests... but also in its future and mediated [interests]’ (Q 10.I, §10; Q 10.II, §31). The introduction of the third term of ‘politics’ to the equation ‘history = philosophy’ thus allows **Gramsci** to think both the extent to which the present is not identical with itself, but rather, is fractured by residual formations of the past and emergent formations directed towards new social practices, and also the means by which the philosophy of praxis’ acknowledgement of its own determination increases its ability to contribute to social transformation.

It is in the context of these developing critiques that the expression ‘absolute historicism’ appears for the first time in the first note entitled ‘An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’: ‘Transcendence, immanence, absolute historicism. Meaning and importance of the history of philosophy’ (Q 8, §204). It emerges as a ‘sublation [*superamento*] of a prior mode of thinking’ (Q 8, §220), produced by appropriating an expression used by **Croce** and, in an act of immanent critique, attempting to give it a level of conceptual consistency which **Croce** had failed to achieve. The essentially critical nature of the term, and critical value of the adjective ‘absolute’ in particular, is underlined by the two alternative lines of affiliation sketched out in ‘Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’ (Q 8, §235) (‘Beyond the series “transcendence, theology, speculation – speculative philosophy”, the other series “transcendence, immanence, speculative historicism – philosophy of praxis”’) and the reformulation of absolute historicism as ‘realistic historicism’, in opposition to ‘speculative historicism’ (Q 10.I, ‘Introduction’; cf. Q 10.I, §11; Q 10.II, §6ii) and to ‘abstract or speculative “absolute philosophy”’ (Q 10.II, §31). The critique of the failings and contradictions of **Croce**’s version of absolute historicism continues throughout Notebooks 8 and 10, particularly in terms of the critique of speculation, and the suggestion that the philosophy of

praxis contains a new notion of immanence – touchstones to which **Gramsci** constantly returns, and which are central to the development of the status of ‘theory’ within the philosophy of praxis (Q 4, §17; Q 8, §238; Q 11, §63), in which the critique of speculation is linked to the question of hegemony (Q 10.I, §8; Q 10.II, §9; Q 11, §24; Q 11, §28; cf. **Boothman** 1991, 62–4; **Frosini** 2003, 143–9).

The most significant conceptual development, however, consists in **Gramsci**’s synthesis of the terms of his critique of **Croce** with his renewed attempt to refute the tradition of metaphysical materialism within Marxism. The expression ‘absolute historicism’, one of the spoils of victory of **Gramsci**’s clash with **Croce**, is now reformed into a genuinely new concept in **Gramsci**’s dialectical workshop, coordinating and summarising his many sided attack upon **Bukharin**’s ‘upside-down idealism’ (Q 11, §14; SPN 437). Although **Bukharin**’s seems to be a perspective diametrically opposed to **Croce**’s, **Gramsci** discovers the same lack of a critique of metaphysics and speculative philosophy at work in **Bukharin**’s search for a first philosophy to underwrite an historical-materialist sociology (Q 11, §14) as he did in **Croce**’s ‘capably disguised form of history according to a plan’ (Q 10.II, §41.xvi): ‘speculative categories are replaced by empirical concepts and classifications which are not less abstract and anti-historical’ (Q 11, §14; SPN 437). Lacking a critique (and in particular, a political critique) of the failings of the speculative mode of practicing philosophy (Q 11, §14), an understanding of the new dialectic (Q 11, §22) or the new meaning of immanence introduced by **Marx** (Q 11, §24; Q 11, §27), **Bukharin** had attempted to posit the speculative concept of matter of metaphysical materialism as a guarantee for Marxism’s (transhistorical) validity (intimately related to his dismissal of all previous philosophies as mere ‘delirium and folly’ (Q 11, §18; SPN 449)). For **Gramsci**, it is essential to comprehend the concept of matter in a realistic and historical sense – that is, not as an a-historical metaphysical category, but as ‘socially and historically organised for production; consequently, natural science should be seen as essentially an historical category, a

human relation’ (Q 11, §30; SPN 465–6). **Gramsci**’s declaration that ‘it has been forgotten that in the case of a very common expression one should put the accent on the first term – “historical” – and not on the second, which is of metaphysical origin’ should thus be understood strictly and literally: as an ‘absolute “historicism”, an ‘absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history’ (Q 11, §27; SPN 465), the philosophy of praxis can explain, overcome and incorporate, rather than merely dismiss, the contradictions of metaphysical materialism, just as it resolves the aporiai of speculative, idealist forms of historicism. It is able to ‘translate’ them into a realistic and historical register – and this ‘translation’ between ‘different philosophical and scientific languages’ and ‘different phases of civilisation’ is ‘organic and profound’ ‘only in the philosophy of praxis’ (Q 11, §47). As the philosophy of praxis possesses a concept of theory (Q 11, §45) which acknowledges that thought, and the systems of thought known as philosophy, are practices directed to the resolution of determinant problems in determinant historical conjunctures or ‘historical blocs’, it is able to provide an account of the emergence, consolidation, political efficacy and decomposition of these doctrines.

**Gramsci** acknowledges that the alternative to the metaphysical guarantee offered by **Bukharin**, namely, ‘to think of a philosophical affirmation as true in a particular historical period (that is, as the necessary and inseparable expression of a particular historical action, of a particular praxis) but as superseded and rendered “vain” in a succeeding period, without however falling into scepticism and moral and ideological relativism, in other words to see philosophy as historicity, is quite an arduous and difficult mental operation’ (Q 11, §14; SPN 436). He nevertheless insists that such an understanding is implicit in the philosophy of praxis, and, crucially, politically enabling. In distinction to all previous historicisms, the philosophy of praxis’ equation of history, philosophy and politics enables it to comprehend not only the historicity of other thought forms, but also, ‘to explain and justify historically itself as well’ (Q 16, §9; SPN 399) ‘as the

result and crowning point' (Q 15, §61; SPN 417), or 'the maximum historicism' (Q 16, §9), of the entire historical-philosophical-political sequence which descends from the nexus of the French Revolution and German idealism. Thus, although the philosophy of praxis, like all thought forms, must 'hold itself to be "exact" and "true" and struggle against other forms of thought', it alone is able to do this 'critically' (Q 11, §45). It does this by acknowledging itself as an historical product of the dynamic of class society which, as an integral element of these contradictions, seeks to resolve them immanently, positing itself 'as an element of the contradiction' and elevating 'this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action' (Q 11, §62; SPN 405). The fully developed concept of absolute historicism thus enacts both a definitive refutation of **Bukharin's** 'return to metaphysics' and provides the philosophy of praxis with a positive programme with which to comprehend and to elaborate philosophy as a practice within history.

2. The concept of absolute historicism did not play a prominent role in the initial reception of the *Prison Notebooks* following WWII. **Gramsci's** *historicism*, his relations to **Croce** and to the tradition of Italian historicism were acknowledged. The thematic organisation of the first edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, however, did not allow an analysis of the critical development and specificity of the concept of *absolute* historicism, resulting in a perception that the adjective played a merely emphatic role ('very, very historicist') in **Gramsci's** argument against **Bukharin**, and was not also, at the same time, an act of immanent critique and transformation of **Croce's** position (a position which continues in post-critical edition Gramscian scholarship cf. **Morera** 1990). Further, the 'allegorical' reading of the *Prison Notebooks* promoted by **Togliatti**, legitimately fearing censorship by the diamat orthodoxy which then reigned in the Soviet Union and international communist movement, tended to obscure the full dimensions of **Gramsci's** critique of **Bukharin's** position which had become, precisely, one of the central professions of faith of this new orthodoxy. A combination of national

and international conjunctures – a widespread questioning of **Crocean** historicism in the context of post-Fascist reconstruction of the Italian state and a partial opening of the space available for theoretical debate in the international Communist movement following the events of 1956 – led to a discussion of the validity of **Gramsci's** historicism in comparison with new theoretical initiatives, above all, in Italy, the Della Volpean school's emphasis upon Marxism as a *science* (particularly during the debate of 1962 following the publication of Nicola **Badaloni's** *Marxismo come storicismo*; cf. **Liguori** 1996, 132–52).

The most significant and influential interpretation of **Gramsci's** notion of absolute historicism, however, was that proposed by Louis **Althusser** in 1965 in one of the central chapters of *Reading 'Capital'*, 'Marxism is not an historicism' (RC 119). This critique, produced in a complex theoretical and political conjuncture (an attempted critique from the Left of the failings of the 'official' critique of Stalinism), was one of the central moments in which many of the features which later came to be known as 'Althusserianism' (anti-historicism, anti-humanism, the critique of an expressivist notion of the social totality) were first fully elaborated. **Althusser** credited **Gramsci** with providing one of the most coherent formulations of a tradition of 'revolutionary humanism and historicism' (RC 120) which emerged from the experience of WWI and the Russian revolution, and which included **Luxemburg**, **Mehring**, **Korsch** and **Lukács** (and whose problematic **Althusser** also detected in **Sartre**, **Della Volpe**, and **Colletti**, among others); he acknowledged that this tradition 'was born out of a vital reaction against the mechanism and economism of the Second International' (RC 119); he praised the 'enormously delicate and subtle work of genius' of **Gramsci**, and in particular, his 'fruitful discoveries in the field of *historical materialism*' (as opposed to what **Althusser** described as **Gramsci's** 'interpretation of *dialectical materialism*' (RC 126)). Nevertheless, he argued that a close analysis of not merely **Gramsci's** 'words' but his "'organic concepts'" (RC 126) revealed the 'latent logic' (RC 131) of a problematic which threatened

Marxism's theoretical and political coherence. Arguing that **Gramsci** had remained 'constantly haunted by Croce's theory of religion', **Althusser** accused him of flattening out the distinction between Marxism, and Marxist philosophy in particular, and other 'conceptions of the world' (RC 130). For the **Althusser** of *Reading 'Capital'*, on the other hand, Marxist philosophy is not merely one 'conception of the world' ranged alongside others: 'what distinguishes Marxism from these ideological "conceptions of the world" is less the (important) formal difference that Marxism puts an end to any supraterrrestrial "beyond", than the distinctive form of this absolute immanence (its "earthliness"): *the form of scientificity*' (RC 131), a form of scientificity constituted by an epistemological rupture with a previous ideological problematic. As such, 'philosophy... remains a systematically ahistorical discipline insofar as it eternally retraces the frontier of the "ideological" and the "scientific"' (**Tosel** 1995, 10–11). **Gramsci**, having failed to acknowledge this distinction, thought the 'relationship between Marxist scientific theory and real history according to the model of a relationship of *direct expression*' (RC 131) of a fundamentally Hegelian pedigree, in which Marxist philosophy was unable to be distinguished from the history from which it organically emerged (RC 132). Indeed, this was the central contention of **Althusser's** critique: that which made **Gramsci's** 'historicism *absolute*', according to **Althusser**, was the fact that the Absolute Knowledge of the Hegelian system was 'itself historicized', and that the privileged moment of transparency reserved by **Hegel** for an indeterminant future moment of Absolute Knowledge was thus surreptitiously transferred to all possible presents, each of which possessed the "essential section" of contemporaneity" (RC 132). In **Althusser's** view, absolute historicisation 'swallows knowledge, as it were, just as historical materialism swallows dialectical materialism' (**Haug** 1996, 58). Much more dangerously, 'the project of thinking Marxism as an (absolute) historicism automatically unleashes a logically necessary chain reaction which tends to reduce and flatten out the Marxist totality into a variation of the Hegelian totality' (RC 132) – as if

**Gramsci's** rejection of **Bukharin's** metaphysical materialism unintentionally itself resulted in a 'return to metaphysics'.

Despite his numerous prefatory precautions and commendations, **Althusser's** critique was not without serious limitations and misunderstandings of **Gramsci's** concept of absolute historicism. Some of these limitations were unavoidable, given the lack of a critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* that allows an analysis of the dialectical emergence and specificity of the concept. Thus **Althusser** regarded the arguments developed in the *Prison Notebooks* as a continuation of the positions which **Gramsci** had adopted as a political organiser and agitator, rather than a searching critique and reconsideration of their pedigrees in the light of the defeat of the workers' movement in the West and the victory of the passive revolution of fascism; he was unable to note the extent of **Gramsci's** critique of **Croce**, and asserted a fundamental continuity between the two thinkers; he could not note the specificity of the adjective 'absolute', as it was appropriated by **Gramsci** from **Croce** and deployed in the senses of 'realistic' and 'maximum', and thus ascribed to it an Hegelian – and metaphysical – meaning fundamentally foreign to the problematic of the *Prison Notebooks*. Other misunderstandings, however, were consequences of **Althusser's** attempted strategy of immanent critique of Stalinist orthodoxy. The early **Althusser** attempted to preserve 'the formal structure of Marxism-Leninism' (**Tosel** 1995, 9), particularly the division of Marxism into an historical materialism and a dialectical materialism. **Althusser** aimed to develop a *theoretical* reformulation of Marxism, which, he hoped, would act as an implicit critique of the *political* degeneration of Marxism into Stalinist domination. He did not note that one of the consequences of this strategy, in relation to his critique of **Gramsci**, was that it led him to assert a variant of precisely that philosophical position (a speculative notion of science as an a-historical guarantee for Marxism's validity) which **Gramsci** had already refuted in his engagement with **Bukharin**. Thus **Althusser** regarded **Gramsci's** notion of the philosophy of praxis as an 'interpretation of dialectical materialism' (126),

rather than a refutation and historical explanation of it; he sophistically asserted that Gramsci's emphasis upon 'the "historicism" of Marxism... is in reality an allusion to the resolutely materialist character of Marx's conception (both in historical and dialectical materialism)' (RC 129; cf. Haug 1996, 58). More seriously, and as a consequence of both the lack of a critical edition and Althusser's philosophical presuppositions, was Althusser's assertion that Gramsci thought the philosophy of praxis' relation to the history in which it emerged as a direct and organic expression of an 'essence' (RC 122) of the present. Althusser could not see that Gramsci's notion of the status of 'theory' within the philosophy of praxis (existing in determinant historical conjunctures) provided an historicist and realistic translation of his own notion of 'Science', and that Gramsci had explicitly rejected an 'organicist', 'emanationist' relation between history and the philosophy of praxis in his critique of nominalism (Q 11, §24; Q 11, §25). Further, Althusser failed to note the extent to which Gramsci had already thought the present's non-identity with itself – i.e. its penetration by residual and emergent social formations – and thus its lack of any unifying essence, as precisely the contradictory terrain on which the philosophy of praxis strives to contribute to the coherence of the working-class movement and its attempt to build social and political hegemony.

Althusser's critique nevertheless exerted, and continues to exert, a large influence on the general Marxist intellectual culture. The appearance of Gerratana's critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* in 1975 contributed to the process of the reassessment of the presuppositions of this critique and the development of more nuanced interpretations. Nicola Badaloni emphasised the importance of the moment of politics and Gramsci's theory of the relation between structures and superstructures in an historical bloc, arguing that 'the absolute historicism for Gramsci is the theory that carries to its most extreme consequences the politicisation of class division, solidifying the aggregations of new social forces around the divided class, and at the same time providing it with the intellectual instruments for expanding its own division into

a hegemonic condition' (Badaloni 1975, 140). In a similar vein, Hermes Spiegel stressed that Gramsci's absolute historicism is 'not an historical relativism': 'By emphasising the historical limits of Marxism, Gramsci at the same time acknowledges the legitimacy of Marxist science within these limits' (Spiegel 1983, 83; cf. Q 10.I, §8; Sablowski 1994, 148). – While Wolfgang Fritz Haug rejected the 'logical [logizistisch] presuppositions of Althusser's critique (1996, 40), André Tosel argued that Althusser's critique was more appropriately applied to 'soft forms of historicism' such as that of Sartre, whereas Gramsci aimed 'to change the very terrain of the question, beyond the distinction science-ideology' in order 'to determine every thought by means of the immanent recognition of its historical conditions of realisation, of its political constitution; in this, he follows Marx, who had thought in this way the relationship between political economy and its critique (1995, 11). – The exploration of the full potentials of an 'absolutely historicist' philosophical and political practice is one of the most pressing challenges, and one of the most fruitful opportunities, for the development and revitalisation of contemporary Marxism.

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Althusserianism, coherence, conjuncture, dialectics, de-Stalinisation, dialectical materialism, economism, French Revolution, Gramscianism, history, historical bloc, hegemony, historiography, historical materialism, historicism, humanism, humanism controversy, idealism/materialism, ideology theory, immanent critique, immanence/

transcendence, Jacobinism, Marxism-Leninism, matter, metaphysical materialism, metaphysics, philosophy of praxis, popularisation, *Prison Notebooks*, relativism, Risorgimento, speculation, totality, truth, vulgar materialism.

Althusser-Schule, Dialektik, dialektischer Materialismus, Entstalinisierung, Französische Revolution, Ganzes, *Gefängnishefte*, Geschichte, geschichtlicher Block, Gramscismus, Hegemonie, Historiographie, historischer Materialismus, Historismus, Humanismus, HumanismusStreit, Idealismus/Materialismus, Ideologietheorie, immanente Kritik, Immanenz/Transzendenz, Jakobinismus, Kohärenz, Konjunktur, Marxismus-Leninismus, Materie, Metaphysik, metaphysischer Materialismus, Ökonomismus, Philosophie der Praxis, Popularisierung, Relativismus, Risorgimento, Spekulation, Vulgärmaterialismus, Wahrheit.