The Extended State

1 The Extension of the Concept of the State

‘State’ and ‘civil society’ are terms and categories that repeatedly appear together in the *Prison Notebooks*, even though each is autonomous and distinct from the other. Here, we shall study them in conjunction, starting out from the category ‘integral’ or ‘extended’ state as a basic interpretative criterion. Gramsci had a dialectical conception of socio-historical reality, within which framework the state and civil society were thought in a nexus of unity-distinction; as such, to address the one without the other is to deny ourselves the possibility of a correct reading of the *Notebooks*. The expression that best denotes this unity-distinction relationship is the ‘extended state’, which, though not directly coming from Gramsci (who spoke, rather, of the ‘integral state’), can be inferred from his writings, and was introduced in 1975 by Christine Buci-Glucksmann, who identified Gramsci’s ‘expansion of the concept of the state’ as his greatest theoretical-political contribution.

What does it mean to use this category, the ‘extended state’? It indicates two things: on the one hand, it grasps the dialectical nexus (unity-distinction) between state and civil society, without ‘rubbing out’ either of the two terms; on the other hand, it indicates, in context, that such a unity is realised *under the hegemony of the state*. For sure, neither term can be absorbed by the other conceptually, but – in the reality of the twentieth century on which Gramsci reflected and which his theory reflects – the state did play a *protagonist* role. Gramsci, like other Marxist and non-Marxist political thinkers, was able to grasp this.

In the *Notebooks*, the concept of the state is ‘extended’ in two directions:

a) understanding the new relationship between politics and economics, which Gramsci identified as one of the characteristic traits of the twentieth century, as he reflected on Fascist ‘corporatism’, the experiences of the Soviet Union, and the situation brought about by the ‘Crash’ on Wall Street: the many sides of one same coin, which had begun to become clear at least from

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1 q6, § 87: Gramsci 1975, p. 763.
the time of the First World War and had emerged in the reflection of thinkers such as Walter Rathenau and Otto Neurath. It should be noted that these themes were present in the theoretical debates of the Third International, and so, too, in the Austro-Marxism of the early 1920s – at the same time as Gramsci had cause to stay first in Moscow, then in Vienna. As we have said, it was a new relationship between politics and economics, but for Gramsci, as we shall see, this did not invalidate Marx’s and Marxists’ thesis as to economics’ determining role ‘in the last instance’.

b) understanding the new relationship between ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ (in the properly Gramscian sense, the ‘site of consensus’), which Gramsci arrived at through his fine-tuning of his theory of hegemony. This same relationship between political society and civil society had, according to Gramsci, begun to change even in the nineteenth century, and was fully consolidated in the following century. As we know, Gramsci expressed this change with the spatial metaphor of East and West. Gramsci’s reflections were also, inevitably, conditioned by his study of the ‘totalitarian’ examples which, for different reasons, greatly weighed on his thought – the Italian Fascist state and the Soviet state – even if the conclusions he reached went beyond the terms of such models.

2 The First ‘Extension’: Politics and Economics

Let us begin on the first front, regarding the relationship between the state and economics. First off, we should sweep aside any doubts: Gramsci situated himself firmly on a Marxist terrain. He did not substitute politics for economics, but simply forcefully reaffirmed the dialectical nexus between – and reciprocal activity of – these two levels of reality; he delved into the very core of the ‘superstructure’, but on the basis of the fundamental lesson provided by Marx. Though some ambiguities may have appeared in his youthful writings, in the Notebooks Gramsci repeatedly polemicised against Gentile and his school of thought, refusing to make the state the subject of history and still less the subject of the capitalist mode of production. Again taking up, in a second draft, a note from the seventh notebook addressing Ricardo and the theory of the state as a ‘factor that guarantees property, thus the monopoly over the means of

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3 See Chapter 3 on Gramsci’s positions on the state in the *Ordine Nuovo* years, as Leninist influences at first complemented and then gradually replaced the influences of Gentile.