The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth—i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question. (Second Thesis on Feuerbach.)

When Marx wrote that ‘Man must prove the truth—i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice’, he declared his simultaneous rejection of a metaphysics of ‘Truth’ just as much

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as a relativist liquidation of it into so many ‘beautiful lies’. For Marx, there exists neither an external criterion of a ‘beyond’ to which we might make appeal, as a guarantee of our certainties or confirmation of our delusions, nor a subjectivist interiority that ‘authorises’, in all senses of the word. Yet, having dispensed with these traditional solutions, Marx does not dissolve the question of truth into a banal pragmatics. Rather, truth is brought down to earth, just ‘as Prometheus’ stole ‘fire from heaven’,\(^2\) as an internal grade of reality \([Wirklichkeit]\) and power \([Macht]\) traversing our practices from within. The pretensions of the metaphysical tradition to negate the self-constituting reality of ‘this side of paradise’ are thereby deflated; but, so too, is the overweening pride of those anti-metaphysical perspectives that implicitly and paradoxically accept the paradigmatically metaphysical assertion that no truth is to be found in this vale of tears when they dispense completely with the category of truth as a touchstone of thought and action.

All of Gramsci’s philosophical research in the *Prison Notebooks* could be regarded as an extended and multifaceted meditation upon this, the second of the Theses on Feuerbach. As we have seen, Gramsci’s absolutely historicist comprehension of the status of philosophy aimed to combat any manifestation of metaphysics, even and especially its residues, as politically debilitating for the practice of proletarian hegemony. Viewed from the perspective of the history of philosophy, this involves thinking

>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of a particular historical action, of a particular praxis), while at the same time recognising that it can be superseded and rendered ‘vain’ in a succeeding period.\(^3\)

Bukharin could not attain to this ‘quite arduous and difficult mental operation’ of comprehending ‘philosophy as historicity’, and thus fell backwards into a variant of the metaphysical positions, positing an abstract-universal ‘outside of time and space’,\(^4\) an ‘supra-historical [truth]’.\(^5\) Just as for Marx, truth for

\(^3\) Q 11, §14; SPN, p. 436.
\(^4\) Q 11, §14; SPN, p. 437.
\(^5\) Ibid.