

philosophers: it is clear that atheism is a purely negative and sterile form, unless it is to be conceived as a period of pure popular literary polemic.)

Passage from Knowing to Understanding and to Feeling and vice versa from Feeling to Understanding and to Knowing

The popular element "feels" but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element "knows" but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other. Not that the pedant cannot be impassioned; far from it. Impassioned pedantry is every bit as ridiculous and dangerous as the wildest sectarianism and demagoguery. The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated—i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism).⁶²

If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [*dirigenti*] and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force—with the creation of the "historical bloc".

De Man "studies" popular feelings: he does not feel with them

⁶² See note 83 on p. 187.

to guide them, and lead them into a catharsis of modern civilisation. His position is that of the scholarly student of folklore who is permanently afraid that modernity is going to destroy the object of his study. What one finds in his book is the pedantic reflection of what is, however, a real need: for popular feelings to be known and studied in the way in which they present themselves objectively and for them not to be considered something negligible and inert within the movement of history.

CRITICAL NOTES ON AN ATTEMPT AT POPULAR SOCIOLOGY

A work like the *Popular Manual*,⁶³ which is essentially destined for a community of readers who are not professional intellectuals, should have taken as its starting point a critical analysis of the philosophy of common sense, which is the "philosophy of non-philosophers", or in other words the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. At those times in history when a homogeneous social group is brought into being, there comes into being also, in opposition to common sense, a homogeneous—in other words coherent and systematic—philosophy.⁶⁴

The first mistake of the *Popular Manual* is that it starts, at least implicitly, from the assumption that the elaboration of an original philosophy of the popular masses is to be opposed to the great systems of traditional philosophy and the religion of the leaders of the clergy—i.e. the conception of the world of the intellectuals and of high culture. In reality these systems are unknown to the

⁶³ i.e. Bukharin's *Theory of Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology* (see introduction to this section). For reasons of censorship Gramsci refers to Bukharin throughout this section simply as "the author" and to his book as the "Popular Manual" (*Saggio popolare*) or just "the Manual".

⁶⁴ For a more systematic exposition of Gramsci's own ideas on common sense, and therefore on the correct starting point for a popular work on Marxism, see the opening pages of "Some Preliminary Points of Reference", p. 323 ff.