Gramsci’s Critique of Civil Society: Its Contemporary Significance.

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In the era of globalization, two contradictory discourses are clearly noticeable in civil society movement. On the one hand, there are votaries of civil society, who offer a militant view of the state and argue that the state must be challenged on the grounds of transparency, accountability, downsizing and so on. Such a view was long ago articulated by Locke. According to this view, civil society is bearer of rights and could be a source of resistance to the state, in case the state violates human rights. This view, as also Locke’s, does not seek to problematize civil society. On the contrary, civil society, in this view, is the principle organizer of human life. Such a view is usually found in the neo-liberal critiques of the state today. On the other hand, the various sections of the Left, using a productivist model of politics or a feminist model or environmentalism, wonder how civil society could be seen a source of resistance to the state power as civil society legitimizes capitalism and the coercive state power. Both these pro-civil society stances and anti-civil society stances form a dichotomy in the era of globalization today.

Aspects of the above dichotomy were perceived for the first time by Gramsci during the inter-war period, while some other aspects are product of our time. Due to various reasons, as stated below, Gramsci’s original position on the subject is little known. However, Gramsci modifies both pro-civil society stances of liberalism (originally Locke’s) and anti-civil society stances of the Left (originally Marx’s). It would be pertinent to recollect certain original positions articulated on these issues Gramsci long ago. The present paper proposes certain middle grounds, recovered from Gramsci, as a way out of the above dualism.
Gramsci’s Problematic:

Gramsci launches a skeptical (=liberal) view of power in civil society on the foundations provided by Marx but on the basis of a revised understanding of Marx via a critical reading of liberalism/Catholic religion. For him, it is now necessary to be skeptical of powers in civil society, without giving up a liberal belief in the intrinsic merits of civil society. Only Hegel before Gramsci is skeptical of powers of civil society but his skepticism is expressed in terms of the state power rather than civil society’s norms. Hegel considers civil society as a complex set of institutions that believe in particularities whereas the state promotes universalities¹. His definition of civil society is construed from the point of view of the state. In contrast with Hegel, Gramsci shows clearly how it is possible to criticize civil society on the basis of civil society’s own norms rather than the state power as shown below. He is sensitive to a liberal skeptical view of power: an institution of power, to start with, must be examined critically from inside rather than from outside its domain. Gramsci, for the first time, applies skepticism to reflect on powers of civil society within Marxist tradition, even though he fails to apply the same yardstick to the state power. But where he does succeed, as shown below, he exposes the liberal apologia for civil society vividly as never before.

Gramsci scholars notice that Gramsci does not share with Marx’s vision of abolishing civil society. For Marx and Engels, there is no distinction between civil society and class relations: “civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie”². When classes including bourgeoisie are abolished, civil society also withers away. The Gramsci scholarship is confused, partly due to ambivalences in Gramsci’s own conceptualizations. Recently, Femia argues that Gramsci’s ‘revisionist turn’ moves away from “Marx’s open hostility of liberal values” and is also the basis of post-Marxian turns in Europe³. Femia is skeptical of Gramsci’s attempts to take liberal turns and also assumes a dichotomy between liberalism and Marxism. Buttegieg claims that for Gramsci civil society is “integral part of the state;...”. ⁴ This is as good as saying that civil society means ‘the ideological state apparatus’, whereas the state’s political society is represented by its coercive wing.⁵ Similarly, Chantal Mouffe, another Gramsci scholar, confesses that she was oblivious of the significance of liberalism in socialist strategy including Gramsci’s⁶. Therefore, an attempt is made
below to show how Gramsci turns liberal within the socialist camp. There are two crucial strengths of liberalism recognized by Gramsci.

Liberal and Socialist Views of Man: A Dichotomy

First, Gramsci is very skeptical of both liberal and socialist conception of ‘man’. (feminists may excuse Gramsci!) He expresses dissatisfaction with regard to liberal/catholic view of man defined through the individual only. He also argues that a socialist view of man defined through social units like productive forces and production relations is not very satisfactory. Gramsci tries to break free from this dualistic conception of man. He argues: “….it is necessary to reform the concept of man. One must conceive of human being as a series of active relationships (a process) in which individuality is perhaps the most important element among other elements to be taken into account. The humanity which is reflected in each individuality is composed of various elements: 1. the individual; 2. other men; 3. the natural world”. It is a mere Aristotelian rhetoric to claim that “man is a political animal”. He argues, “not all necessary consequences have been drawn from this, even on an individual level”. Why is each person a philosopher, while each is a scientist too? Why, for example, all his contemporary communists are not like Karl Marx with the similar level of productive forces and class relations as Marx’s? Here, he anticipated Sartre’s revolt against Marxism. Decades later, Sartre asked a similar question: if class determines the nature of each individual, why then the contributions of all his contemporary petty bourgeois romantics are not as memorable as Valerie’s? One may ask, following Gramsci or Sartre, a similar question: why all contemporary ‘petty bourgeois’ humanist poets/essayists are not as memorable figures as Rabindra Nath Tagore? Therefore, there is something unique in each individual or even a small group. What are these unique aspects of each individual or each sub-strata of a class? How does one understand each person’s creativity or stagnation or decay within the same class ideology? So, he pleads for a revision of the dichotomous conceptions of man subscribed by individualism and socialism.
Civil Society’s positive and negative functions:

Second, despite many ambiguities in his definition of civil society, Gramsci makes a very important distinction between civil society and classes on the one hand and civil society and the state power on the other hand. Borrowing an economic analogy, it may be said that for Gramsci civil society provides 'backward linkages' (inputs) for the state while it receives 'forward linkages' (outputs) from classes. Therefore, civil society occupies a space in between class and the state\(^{10}\).

Bobbio argues that superstructure has two elements: civil society and the state\(^{11}\). For Bobbio, civil society articulates consent and moral/intellectual leadership (positive elements), whereas the state represents coercion and ideological/political leadership (negative elements). This paper uses Bobbio’s language and offers a different interpretation of Gramsci’s civil society. On Bobbio’s interpretation of Gramsci, civil society is a positive phenomenon, whereas the state is a negative phenomenon. Contra Bobbio, Gramsci suggests that both positive (like moral/intellectual) and negative functions (like ideological/political) co-exist within the domain of civil society. Texier emphasizes the opposite side neglected by Bobbio that civil society serves moral and intellectual functions of ruling classes, providing for rationalization of hegemony and does not say anything on the need for civil society in future as proposed by Gramsci himself. Gramsci however emphasizes that civil society provides 'rationalization' (intellectual or moral elaboration) of class-State (negative element) on the one hand and ethical-State (positive element) on the other hand\(^{12}\).

For Gramsci, civil society is not simply a positive political phenomenon as claimed by Bobbio\(^{13}\). It receives class instincts, class interests, class struggle and tries to normalize them through family, religious associations, cultural groups, and networks of social capital. For example, not merely neo-liberal thinkers but also the poor feel that they are poor as they have not availed opportunities due to their moral inferiority and so on\(^{14}\). Such moral beliefs are cultivated in and through many networks like family, secular religion, educational institutions and so on. White racism claims that there exists a great inherited difference between whites and Negroes as groups, preventing solidarities on common issues\(^{15}\). The subaltern classes tend to live in a world of ambivalent consciousness of their own selves, property, education, job, and so on due to 'normalizing'
functions of civil society\textsuperscript{16}. More often, their claims against private property or unemployment or for substantial wages or for education, houses and so on, are de-legitimized by civil society institutions. It produces a condition of “moral and political passivity”\textsuperscript{17}. The subaltern classes sometime feel that they deserve what they should get. They deserve ‘this fate’. A kind of fatalism sets in due to their weak position in civil society\textsuperscript{18}. Thus civil society prepares its members ideologically to justify economic exploitation by private property. Civil society receives economic outcomes but manufactures these outputs as ideologies that give credence to economy under capitalism. It prevents economic crisis from snowballing into political instability. It is through civil society, class life looks ‘normal’. By using an economic analogy, it may be said that economic outcomes are like ‘forward linkages’ (outputs) of civil society. Civil society organs, through ideologies, receive economic outcomes like crises or depression and prevent them for becoming major class conflicts\textsuperscript{19}. Gramsci calls for “in depth study” of how civil society normalizes “fighting spirit” of the subaltern by organizing its “defensive systems” in a war of position (like economic depressions etc.) to support a class-state\textsuperscript{20}.

Civil society organizations also have primary functions with regard to the state power. Continuing with the same economic analogy, it may be said that these institutions supply political/ideological ‘inputs’ (backward linkages) to the state power. It supplies political and ideological leaders or norms to the state power. Civil society is a source of strength of the state power. The state is represented by political or ideological leadership that complements economic-corporate leadership of capitalism. Both these kinds of leadership – ideological and political - are prepared by civil society networks.

First, it legitimizes coercive functions of the state power. Not simply Max Weber but also the subaltern classes feel that the state monopolizes coercive functions. Everybody in civil society feels that everybody else may encroach into each other’s privacy, property, employment and so on. So, a neutral ground is created by civil society so as to justify the need of the state. Members of civil society feel that as they have no time to look after security interests of each other, they need a special organ with special powers. Also, the state functionaries are trained by civil society networks to remain neutral to purely economic-corporate interests.
Second, as Anne S. Sassoon argues, the state adopts certain principles of civil society and emerges as ‘ethical educator’ or ethical State\textsuperscript{21}. It educates not merely rulers but also common public. It manufactures public opinion in economic matters. In turn, the concept of law that belongs to the state can be extended to civil society networks as, through customs and conventions, public can be brought under a collective pressure – a sort of tacit coercion. Thus, civil society supplies the state power with many ‘inputs’ or ‘backward linkages’ (raw materials). It supplies different kinds of leadership to manage class-state. Its puritan ideologies organize ‘support’ (to use a behavioral concept) for a coercive class-state\textsuperscript{22}. Gramsci rejects any dichotomy between consent and coercion and argues how civil society networks, especially puritan ideologies, try to offer rationalization of coercion in economic base as well as political society. Moreover, customary pressure or tacit coercion operates within the sphere of civil society as sort of a parallel moment of legal coercion of the state power.

In the above discussions, we have seen a sample of ideological/political functions internal to civil society. These functions may be called negative functions. Let us now examine intellectual/moral functions or what Bobbio calls ‘positive’ functions of civil society. Civil society follows one very crucial moral principle: manufacturing consent of its members. Though it tries to win over the consent of the subaltern classes, it does more than that. It trains members in citizenship. It educates people in the values of privacy, individual freedom, and in leadership and so on. It trains people in respecting each other’s privacy. It trains people to become intellectuals of some substance. It imparts rational and social thinking over time. Each member now feels: ‘where there is will, there is a way’. Not simply Bentham but also ordinary citizens believe that they live in a world of equality of opportunities, though ordinary perceptions are very ambivalent. These functions are positive as they are mainly based on the principle of consent (moral). Second, civil society also performs what Gramsci calls ‘cultural functions’ as distinct from economic functions\textsuperscript{23}. It builds upon ability or capacity (intellectual) of its members through education imparted by civil society networks. It is in civil society the child is educated to be ‘social and rational’ in his/her life-cycles. The child becomes intellectual, philosopher and scientist in and through civil society networks. But these positive functions (moral/intellectual) co-exist with negative functions
(ideological/political) in civil society. The negative functions are justified through the ideology of persuasion. Members must be mutually persuaded to argue for coercive powers of the state. As a result, the positive functions are not universalized as civil society provides a basis for class-state.

While Gramsci shares Marx’s vision that socialism must abolish class exploitation, and state violence, he also thinks that socialism means reestablishment of civil society’s positive plurality. Socialism, for Gramsci, means reconstruction rather than disappearance of civil society. Gramsci revises Marx’s assumption that associational life is only economic-corporate and that politics is politics of production. Though, he along with Marx believes in the disappearance of the state, he broadens Marx’s view of politics by both separating out civil society from economy and by offering a broader understanding of it. Gramsci argues: “it is only possible to create a system of principles asserting that the State’s goal is its own end, its own disappearance, in other words the re-absorption of political society into civil society.” For him, the plural functions of present civil society would have to be redefined rather than be abolished as claimed by Marx. It may still do moral functions and intellectual functions (like education or care) rather than ideological and political functions (like training to dominate or coerce) in future. The principles of consent are universalized by a ‘regulated society’ that must shred off principles of violence or domination. The present civil society has put its own ethical or consent principles at the altar of capital and the state. Hence, it cannot be taken for granted with regard to the human rights question. For it may normalize exploitation (in economy) or coercion (within the state or family). It has no ability to push its own positive principles (consent) to prevail in the entire society, as it is also geared to draw subaltern’s consent to class outcomes (backward linkage) and state coercion (forward linkage). Moreover, the claims against economic exploitation, familial or political violence may be de-legitimized or brushed aside by a self-seeking civil society. As a result, it may restrict the growth of human rights issues.

Bobbio rightly reminds of Gramsci’s insights into the need for a future ‘regulated society’. Bobbio then tries to shows how, according to Gramsci, civil society withers away as the state disappears. Nowhere, Gramsci says so. Gramsci on the contrary argues that the future civil society would reabsorb the state and would have to address a very significant ‘cultural function’.
Gramsci assumes that socialist society will have to face a foundational question that Aristotle and Hobbes (for Gramsci: Catholics) asked: `how to make man'? Gramsci draws an insight from Catholic religion which believes that human being is born alone and is solely responsible for his crimes\(^{28}\). As a result, Catholics believe that each human being needs the moral order of a society so that each becomes `rational' and `social'\(^ {29}\). Gramsci argues that there is some truth in Catholic claims. He also suggests that liberal individualism draws very important philosophical insights from Catholicism and builds its own ideology. Therefore, he states clearly that a number of special institutions should be there under socialism to transform child into a rational human being in several stages through moral and intellectual functions\(^ {30}\). The future civil society must renew the twin tasks: economic functions and cultural functions - being performed by the present civil society\(^ {31}\). Thus, Gramsci argues that new society must have a variety of special institutions ranging from family, educational, cultural organizations and so on that must cumulatively undertake the tasks of human civilization: how to `make man'? His project echoes the idea of institutional pluralism of liberalism set up since Hobbes and pleads for its recognition in socialist camp. It is incorrect to claim that he advocates the disappearance of civil society by means of civil society, as claimed by Keane against Gramsci\(^ {32}\). He would have rather agreed with John Keane that a socialist project must be concerned with a transformation of civil society by means of civil society rather than abolish altogether and thus would pave the way for a creation of socialist civil society\(^ {33}\).

**Contemporary Significance for a Human Right Discourse: Certain Implications**

It may be interesting to recall here that Gramsci began his political career in the Socialist Party of Italy (PSI) as a member activist in its Human Rights Cell. I would like to claim that economic-civilization functions of a human rights movement, which he learned from his activist days in this cell remained close to his passions, to which he returned in his defense of what Bobbio calls civil society's `positive functions'. Gramsci opens up frontiers of human rights on the basis of and beyond production-centered politics ("a politics grafted directly on to the economy\(^ {34}\)) of socialist predecessors of 19\(^ {th}\) century. Human rights activists, following Gramsci's plea, need to be vigilant of rationalization of exploitation or violence by civil society institutions ranging from family
onwards. Similarly, Gramsci is sensitive to politics performing `cultural' task and it opens up new rights/duties. As civil society performs dual tasks, both positive and negative functions, new rights open up on the foundations of civil society. Henceforth, human rights activists would realize the need to be critical of negative functions of civil society, while they would also re-affirm positive functions in the rights discourse. A significant inference is now possible to draw from the above: human rights activism should not be seen merely opposing negative functions of civil society but also must concentrate on the construction of positive functions, and work towards its `universalization'. Human rights movement needs a dual perspective of civil society: politics of opposition/construction. As Gramsci reminds that the positive functions of civil society are not universalized as yet which should be a goal of human rights discourse. While human rights activism must participate in civil society that aims at the transformation of each human child into a rational and social being and so on (a construction activity), human rights activists must at once be vigilant of politics of discrimination that may impose fetters on human rights (an oppositional activity). For example, where families may practise discrimination against girl child or woman, human rights activism must sensitise members to respect non-discriminatory practices that promote gender rights like education, sharing care and upbringing of child, equal share of domestic work and so on, thus reducing the drudgery of women's work. Gramsci's self-critical perspective of civil society should be seen as an evolutionary process, a process that must look beyond Gramsci's time. What remains however important for human rights activism is his self-critical perspective rather than a liberal complacent/opportunist view of civil society.

**Gramsci's theory and Its Implications for New Foundations of Rights**

First, for Gramsci a human rights discourse must begin with the very location of being of the individual. He argues that this is a very important lesson from Catholicism. Therefore, like Hobbes and Locke, Gramsci also argues that the individual is the primary unit of human rights axis, a point not very well recognized by the Gramsci scholars.

Second, a radical human rights discourse must recognize ontological/natural rights. Whereas for Gramsci, following Marx, a key foundation of rights is to be located in human praxis (praxis
includes rationality): the ability to reshape nature while constructing society. Social construction follows our interaction with nature. Society may facilitate or fetter human praxis. When society/civil society may fetter human praxis or human interaction with nature or restrict a human being’s access to nature as “a persona” (to borrow from Rousseau) or its “resources” (to borrow from the Enlightenment) or both, then claims for or against arise. Such claims are human rights or ontological rights. Thus, not just rationality but praxis constitutes a very important basis (of human rights), a point discovered by Marx and reaffirmed by Gramsci, even though it must be admitted that Marx’s theory is inattentive to a human rights theory.

Third, our interaction with each other or social interaction constitutes another foundation of human rights. Gramsci argues that society may practise different kinds of inequalities which may give rise to claims for or against inequalities. Such inequalities must be challenged by human rights activism on the grounds of human rights axis. Thus, unlike liberals or neo-liberals, Gramsci opens up human rights issues in civil society too. In a society of inequalities, practiced by economy, civil society and political institutions, human rights activism must challenge all these institutions that may hinder each human being from accessing nature’s resources/production or ethical/civilization resources or both and thus may prevent each from capacity-building in different directions.

Fourth, Gramsci modifies Marx’s proposal that identifies civil society with economic/production relations. By separating civil society from class and from the state, Gramsci opens up new possibilities in socialist camp. A new civil society that would not advocate class inequalities or state coercion must provide each person with rights to access to two distinct resources: economic (production) entitlements and (civilizational) cultural entitlements. Marx notices the need for the first aspect very well under capitalism and argues for its universalization under socialism as capitalism denies economic entitlements to everybody. But Marx fails to notice the need for cultural entitlements in bourgeois society. Certain special institutions in civil society are required to promote cultural entitlements, a point Gramsci learns for liberalism and Catholicism rather than from Marxism. On this issue, he stands in unison with a liberal claim: civil society imparts a new sense of civilization in each person. Under capitalism, civil society is not able to universalize such cultural entitlements by not being in a position to offer such entitlements to everybody. Socialists
must fight for equal/universal access to such civilizational entitlements and not just fight for universal access to economic (production) entitlements for each person. Thus, Gramsci pleads socialists to recognize the need for a new socialist civil society rather than argue for the abolition of civil society. Gramsci makes a breakthrough in a liberal theory by challenging liberal complacency about civil society since Locke’s time, though his formulations on a new civil society and the state are not without any problem which constitutes a different subject matter. So long as civil society remains an ideal of human civilizations, Gramsci’s critique will be remembered for ever.

Notes:

1 C Taylor argues that for Hegel civil society “is the sphere of the individual in which universality is only abstract”. See, Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), 433. This obviously implies that the state is the sphere in which universality is concrete. Civil society is thus defined in terms of its teleological other, the State.

2 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology (1847) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 98. However, credit must go to them for saying that civil society is a social form of interaction between human society and nature in all histories: “the form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces at all previous historical stages, and in its turn determining these, is civil society.” Ibid, 57. Gramsci was unaware that he shared this view of Marx and Engels and developed their views even further.


4 J A Buttigieg, “Gramsci on Civil Society”, boundary2, 22: 3 (1995), 4. Marcus Green, however, does not share such a view of Gramsci’s position. He argues clearly that though civil society, for Gramsci, is superstructureal, it is not part of the state. He shows well that in Gramscian sense, civil society is not the same as political society (the state). It is one thing to say it is an ‘integral state’ but is altogether different thing to claim that it is an integral part of the state, as Buttigieg claims. See, Marcus Green,
“Gramsci cannot speak: Presentation and Interpretations of Gramsci’s concept of the Subaltern”.


6 Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, “In Interview.” Ed. Ian Angus. Institute of Humanities, Simon Fraser University,1999. (http://www.knowtv.com/primetime/conflicting/mouffe.html) She argues, “Well, I should point out that, at the moment when we began to develop that, we were not thinking so much, in terms of the relation with the liberal view.” By ‘that’, she means their joint book, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (London: Verso, 1985).


11 Bobbio, N. Ibid.

12 Bobbio and Texier posit opposite arguments, both having evidences for their arguments in Gramsci. See Jacques Texier, “Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructure”, in C Mouffe (ed.), Gramsci and Marxist
Theory (London: RKP, 1979), 70-71. The point however is Gramsci holds a middle position on civil society. Gramsci argues that civil society provides for ‘cultural’ resources for both class-state (Texier: Ibid) and ethical-state (or ‘state without a state’) (Bobbio: 94). For a distinction between class-state and ethical-state, however, see Gramsci, Op. cit., 262-263.

13 Bobbio identifies civil society with “a factor of hegemony” but locates civil society in the realm of consent and the state with force. See Bobbio, Op. cit., 95. Bobbio forgets to tell that consent to force, or to exploitation is not at all positive element for Gramsci.

14 For this sort of social Darwinism as relay of popular beliefs and stereotypes, see Gunnar Myrdal, Objectivity in Social Research. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 1969), 98. As a result, the poor live with ‘intellectual and moral inferiority’, Ibid.

15 Ibid., 22.

16 Here, normalizing function is used in a Gramscian sense. As in Foucault, power is seen as a benign process by the subaltern classes but, unlike in Foucault, power has inherent limitations from the point of view of their ‘common sense’, another Gramscian term. Foucault’s theory does talk about limits to power but in a voluntaristic manner. A typical Gramscian account of power would not allow for any voluntaristic assertion, while admitting limits to power. See, Arun K Patnaik, “Gramscian concept of Common sense”, Economic and Political Weekly, 23: 5, (1988): PE 2 – PE 10. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/4378042)


18 Ibid., 337.

19 Ibid., 235. Gramsci argues, “….civil society has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic ‘incursions’ of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions), etc.”
20 Ibid.


23 See, Gramsci, Op. cit., 242, argues, “Educative and formative role of the state. Its aim is always that of creating new and higher types of civilization; of adapting ‘civilization’ and the morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production; hence of evolving even physically new types of humanity”. Gramsci here alludes to a distinction between civilizational/moral function and economic/production function of the state. After the state disappears, these functions need to be delivered by civil society. Also, see his explicit reference to these twin functions already performed by civil society, not simply by the state, Op. cit., 258-59.

24 Gramsci, Op. cit., 259, argues, “Marx’s was not able to have historical experiences superior (or at least much superior to) to those of Hegel; but, as a result of his journalistic and agitational activities, he had a sense for the masses. Marx’s concept of organization remains entangled amid the following elements: craft organization; Jacobin clubs; secret … groups; journalistic organization”. According to Gramsci, Marx could not grasp the dynamics of civil society organizations.

25 Ibid., 253.


27 Ibid., 95.
Gramsci, Op. cit., 351-52, “… there does not exist, historically, a way of seeing things and of acting which is equal for all men, no more no less”. Gramsci learned this principle from Christianity. Referring to Catholic individualism, he argues, “…it insists on putting the cause of evil in the individual man himself, or in other words, it conceives of man as defined and limited individual”. Ibid., 352.

Ibid., 337.

See his notes on education in new a society, Ibid., 40-41.

By economic/production functions Gramsci refers to (a) “interaction with nature” or productive forces. By civilizational/moral functions Gramsci refers to society’s civilization tasks of “making man” through a continuous re-invention of a range of institutions that lay down norms for what Gramsci calls the growth of (b) “the individual” as also his interaction (c) “with the other men”, as cited above. The former may be called as economic entitlement and the latter as cultural entitlement. By culture, Gramsci refers to moral and intellectual resources in a wide sense of the term. For culture in Gramscian sense, Bobbio, Op. cit., 94.

John Keane argues, “Gramsci’s interest in civil society is wholly opportunistic as he is driven by the reverie of abolishing civil society by means of civil society. Civil society is temporary and dispensable arrangement.” Author (ed.) Op. cit., 25.


Gramsci’s historicist polemic against ’man in general’ suggests a celebratory view of human praxis, human history etc. He errs in denying limits set by nature on praxis/history and fails to recognize what Hobbes calls ‘animalism’ in each human being. His deficient view poses few problems for a socialist theory. See S Timpanaro, On Materialism (London: Verso, 1980), 45 and 236-37. For example, the positions of Marx and Gramsci on the state may partly belong to an instrumental genre (the idea of

36 Gramsci intends his Prison Notebooks as a reflection of his commitment for issues that may last for ever. See, for a war of position for ever – a typical Gramscian theme more applicable in the context of civil society, Joseph Francese, ‘Thoughts on Gramsci's Need “To Do Something 'Für ewig”’. Rethinking Marxism, 21:1, 2009: 54 – 66.

References:


