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Mosca and the Theory of Elitism by Ettore A. Albertoni

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here and now (331), and a hypotopia is the opposite, a de-generate form of dystopia, that is, a degraded place that exhibits all the shortcomings of human places. "Here at the interface between desirable places and undesirable ones is the locus of social formation, meaning and structure" (332). With reference to three different types of spaces—the Paris Latin Quarter, Sartre's *No Exit*, and a painting by Pinturicchio—Silverman shows how these heterotopian discourses can be analyzed in their relation to "utopian projections or dystopian dejections" (337). In all these cases, the deconstruction of this interpretive topology not only opens up the understanding of these spaces, but also deconstructs the hypertopian/hypotopian opposition in order to make explicit, says Silverman, "the text of human spatial experience [which] is situated at the juncture between the two" (334).

The possibility of an archeology of heterotopias leads directly to Silverman's last and perhaps most crucial task: a hermeneutic semiology of the self whose task will be "to establish a direct correlation between the self as interpreter and the system of signs produced in the interpretation" (338). It is in this gathering of the "how" of hermeneutic interpretation and of the "what" of semiological analysis that the self is formed. This is because signs are signs of an interpretive act, signs of a presence and of an actualization of the self's sign system which can only be recovered through interpretation itself (345).

As Silverman points out in the Introduction, *Inscriptions* "is not a philosophical treatise." This qualification announces the distancing that distinguishes it from a traditional philosophical investigation. *Inscriptions* prescribes neither a new centering for philosophy nor proliferates older ones. Rather, it seeks to inscribe the space at which philosophies intersect by defining their

terms and their boundaries. *Inscriptions* is at the same time an archeology of knowledge, a theory of typology, a hermeneutic semiology or, simply, a theory of textuality. In other words, it is an important work that creates the possibility for new areas of analysis and requires close scrutiny from all those who today engage in the practice of theoretical understanding.

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Mosca and the Theory of Elitism

By Ettore A. Albertoni

Trans. by Paul Goodrick

Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987

There is a tradition in political and social theory which consists in large measure of the study of the origin and consequences of the following fact—every politically organized society is divided into two classes: a minority of rulers, and a majority of subjects ruled by them. It is often labeled the elite or elitist school, although the term elitism is misleading by conveying an anti-democratic connotation which is not necessarily part of the theory; further, we do not really have a "school" in the full-blown sense that sociologists of knowledge deal with. An example of an important issue discussed by elite theorists is the question of whether and how this class division exists in a democratic society, how elitism conceives the difference between democratic and undemocratic societies, what is the nature and origin of these ruling and elite classes, whether there is any way in which this class division could ever be eliminated, and what is the relation-

ship between elitism and Marxism (which also stresses class division).

The originator of this type of theory is Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), best known as the author of *Elementi di scienza politica*, which was translated into English as *The Ruling Class*. It should also be noted that, for most of his life, Mosca was a university professor (at such places as Turin, Milan, and Rome) and a government official (including senator for the last twenty years of his life). The elite school seems to have flourished in Italy more than elsewhere, the best known of these authors being Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels. However, important contributions have been made by many others, for example Austrian Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) with *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), American C. Wright Mills with *The Power Elite* (1956), and Englishman Thomas B. Bottomore, who is the author of *Elites and Societies* (1964) and of a brief Foreword to the book under review.

Mosca and the Theory of Elitism is a useful and valuable introduction to the history and theory of elitism. Two-thirds of it deals, appropriately, with Mosca's life and thought and relevant historical events in Italy; the rest discusses other important theorists, as well as the current status of Mosca scholarship. The work is generally clear, well organized, and well documented. It is also relatively self-contained in the sense that it presupposes very little in the way of technicalities; at the same time it exposes the reader to many of the latest issues in the scholarly literature. The volume is mostly a translation of the author's Italian book *Dottrina della classe politica e teoria delle elites* (1985), but it is not merely a translation since new material has been added for the English-language edition. Albertoni is a distinguished scholar who teaches at the University of Milan and has authored several other books on Mosca in Italian. Given the socio-political im-

portance of the issues and the recent growth of scholarly interest in Mosca and elitism in Italy and elsewhere, this translation is highly welcome.

Albertoni's account of Mosca focuses on his doctrine of the political class, his attitude toward parliamentarism and democracy, the interplay between the scientific and the ideological components of his thought, and the connection between his thought and Italian historical conditions. As already mentioned, these discussions are useful and valuable, but there is no sustained discussion of Mosca's method of thinking or the approach he follows in his inquiries, aside from a few scattered remarks about positivism, realism, and his Machiavellian, empirical, and historical approach. Such methodological understanding (as we may call it) is always important in the study of a great thinker since it enables us to learn and appreciate important lessons, even while disagreeing about specific substantive details. Moreover, in the context of the present work, the analysis of Mosca's method or approach would have been even more valuable because it would have enabled us to understand better the similarities and differences among the various "elitist" thinkers.

Another comment I would make involves Albertoni's view of Gramsci, especially his failure to appreciate that the author of the Prison Notebooks belongs in an important sense to the tradition of elitism. Of course, this is a complex and controversial matter, and Albertoni is merely following the traditional interpretation of Gramsci as belonging to the opposite tradition of Marxism and as being merely an uncomprehending and negative critic of Mosca (35-37). There is no space here to elaborate the point I have argued elsewhere that it is ironical for anti-Marxist critics to accept uncritically what is ultimately the interpretation of Gramsci contrived by that inimitable Marxist who was Palmiro Togliatti. Let

me rather simply suggest the following as a working hypothesis, for I do not claim to have yet articulated and documented this interpretation: an analysis of the explicit discussions of Mosca in the Notebooks would reveal that Gramsci's criticism was essentially constructive, that he anticipated some common criticisms of Mosca's doctrines (for example, one by no less a Mosca scholar than James H. Meisel, to whom Albertoni refers in other contexts), that Gramsci's theories of intellectuals and of relations of force were carrying on the Moschian research program, and that there are other more implicit parallelisms (such as the meaning of the concept of "democracy" and the explanatory power of "elitism").

A final remark would be that on scores of occasions Albertoni uses the term "dialectics" and its cognates. For example, in regard to Mosca's early work, Albertoni objects that he "was unable to understand the dialectical relationship between the classes which was taking shape during his formative years and while he was writing his first book" (30). And in Mosca's middle period, his earlier concept of political class "is linked dialectically to the 'new concept' toward which his entire research is directed: that of juridical defence" (51). And his late and mature period begins with the second edition (1923) of the *Elementi di scienza politica*, which contains "a new up-to-date and dialectical section" (85), which perhaps involves "dialectics in the doctrine of the political class—science, ideology and ethics" (94). Albertoni does not clarify the conception of dialectic he has in mind, and so it is natural for someone like myself—who has struggled with the analysis of the concept—to wish that more clarification had been provided. Nevertheless, I believe Albertoni has intuited something extremely important about the mature Mosca, namely, the dialectical charac-

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ter of his thought. The elaboration of this intuition would be a most instructive undertaking.

Some of my reasons for this hunch connect with my earlier remarks. If the dialectic is conceived methodologically as a manner of thinking that may be employed in the "scientific" investigation of human affairs (which is my inclination, and if space allowed I would have mentioned the specific conceptual content that defines it), then such a dialectical interpretation would provide the answer to the first issue I raised, namely, what is Mosca's method or approach, as distinct from the specifics of his doctrines. Second, since, as I have argued elsewhere, the dialectic defines the deep structure of Gramsci's thought in the Notebooks, this would add a methodological similarity to the substantive one postulated above to exist between the two thinkers.

In conclusion, Albertoni's work is useful, valuable, and welcome for the information and accounts it provides. But it is even more significant for the insights it indirectly suggests, and for the future research it challenges us to do, those of us who are so impertinent as to complain about its omissions and blemishes.

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Senso e paradosso

By Emilio Garroni
Bari: Laterza, 1986

The definition of "what philosophy is" and what kind of knowledge it legitimizes is a problem unresolved and, to a certain extent, unresolvable. If philosophy is just a form of literary

discourse—as has been stated—we still do not know what literariness is. Maybe philosophy is, more properly, the old name given to the unlimited process of interpretation that characterizes the human enterprise in history. In one word: it is "hermeneutics." We can also ask in what sense philosophical knowledge is different from scientific knowledge. Is the task of the philosopher to build, with "archaeological" or "genealogical" methods, a "history of the ideas"? Or is the purpose of philosophy to build a metalanguage, a "superscience" of some sort, able to re-elaborate the results of the different sciences on a higher level?

To explore and determine what is the "object" of the philosophical enterprise is the main purpose of the most recent book by Emilio Garroni. In it he investigates the nature of *philosophical questioning* more than philosophy as a discipline or a type of knowledge. Garroni, professor of Aesthetics at Rome University, in recent years has increasingly concentrated his attention on authors like Kant (and especially the *Critique of Judgment*), Wittgenstein, and Heidegger in order to understand in what sense answers to questions concerning the foundations of the philosophical enterprise are possible. And if the nature of "general" philosophical knowledge is a problem, an even bigger difficulty surrounds the status of the so-called special philosophies, among which Aesthetics seems to suffer a paradoxically weak position. A close reading of its history, since the first "modern" use of the word by Baumgarten, shows that Aesthetics has been, since the beginning, a "philosophy of art dissatisfied with itself." The dominion of the "aesthetic" as an adjective is nowadays so large and vague that Garroni needs to begin his book by asking himself if, perhaps, Aesthetics is a philosophy "without object," and if, in that case, it is ready to