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Reflections on the hegemonic exclusion of critical realism from academic settings: alone in a room full of people

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss my personal experience of the issues that can arise when adopting critical realism in academic contexts dominated by irrealist (positivist, phenomenological and post-structuralist) methodological approaches. I draw inspiration for my analysis from the concept of Gramscian hegemony and the concept of ‘authenticity’. These concepts are related because hegemonic processes prevent individuals from freely expressing themselves. In my case, academic hegemony has resulted in social pressure to sacrifice my authentic critical realist self in order to achieve academic success. I also discuss groupthink dynamics, suggesting that they are a mechanism by which hegemony – and denial of individual authenticity – can be achieved. This paper is meant to be a theoretical and reflexive discussion, which could be the starting point for empirical studies investigating the situation of a critical realist in a hegemonic academic context.

KEYWORDS

Hegemony; Gramsci; authenticity; critical realism; academia

Introduction

As an early career researcher, my experience of academic debate has been mixed: sometimes it has felt like a free space to explore ideas; and sometimes not. In this paper, I discuss occasions when there has been no room to openly discuss differences of opinion – specifically relating to critical realism. On one occasion, the antagonism towards critical realism resulted in a punitive sanction. This antagonism poses significant problems for critical realists who find themselves in post-structural settings.

Since discovering critical realism, I have read extensively on the subject and tried to ground my future endeavours on its assumptions. I have, at the same time, been attending academic courses on research methodology. Most of these methodologically pluralist courses are run from the standpoints of positivism, phenomenology, hermeneuticism, and post-structuralism. As might be expected, my critical realist reading has lead me to question some of their ontological and epistemological underpinnings. On occasions when I have voiced my questions, my colleagues and the invited teachers have generally – with some exceptions – not been willing to have an academic discussion about them. The message that I received was that using critical realism would be
detrimental to my career. This experience prompted me to reflect upon Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony to explain what might be happening. It also prompted me reflect upon whether – in order to achieve academic success – I would be willing to sacrifice that aspect of my authentic self which considers critical realism to be the best approach to research.

This paper outlines first the concept of hegemony with the help of different authors. The Gramscian concept of hegemony will be connected with other literature and to the author’s experience. Hegemony is then linked to the realms of education and academia, in which it will be discussed in relation to dynamics of groupthink. Finally, the discussion moves to the concept of authenticity and its relation to hegemony. In the conclusions, I will explain which roles these philosophical reflections have had in the everyday decisions I make as a doctoral candidate. The main goal is to present the situation of the critical realist in a hegemonic academic setting in which groupthink dynamics can easily arise and the possible effects on one’s perception of oneself.

The development of the concept of hegemony

Joseph (2015, 164) defines hegemony as ‘the way leadership or dominance is exercised through the attainment of consent’. Joseph (2015, 165) also argues that in the work of Bhaskar, hegemony is mostly conceptualized ‘as a struggle over description and re-description’. Joseph (2015) also relates hegemony to the reproduction of structures. Therefore, the struggle against hegemony is the struggle over the reproduction and transformation of said structures. He argues that hegemony is often seen as an act of domination of ideas, without the use of violence, but this limits it to some kind of political project taking place between different social groups (Joseph 2002, 1). What are then the conditions under which hegemony operates? What makes it necessary? According to Joseph (2002, 10–11), hegemony acts within structures and its strategy needs to take into account such structures. Particular social structures have to be transformed for a socialist strategy. It is important not only to challenge the ideas that are dominant, but also the structures that make them possible (Joseph 2002, 11). Hegemony has several levels such as the reality in which it exists. Critical realism can then be a tool to understand both how hegemony emerges and how it operates (Joseph 2002, 14).

Joseph (2002, 21–2) connects the conception of hegemony to Machiavelli’s writings. Fontana (1993, 11) argues that the interpretation of Machiavelli has two purposes for Gramsci. On the one hand, he presents a critique of the interpretations of Machiavelli’s own time; and on the other hand, he criticizes Italian politics. Fontana (1993, 8) also explains how Machiavelli put forward the need to understand the importance of the ‘mass’ in politics. Machiavelli therefore wrote that politics should be based on ‘people’ and that power should be issued from them as well. He also ‘understood politics as pure power and technique, a knowledge that reduces itself to the elaboration of means and instruments by which power could be attained and maintained’ (Fontana 1993, 8–9). According to Joseph (2002, 21–2), Machiavelli was the first to start the discussion on a theory regarding hegemony. Machiavelli wrote that for a leader it was important to use both ‘force and consent’, which is also connected to Gramsci’s conception of hegemony. Furthermore, Machiavelli does not seem to focus much on the force side, because he considers consent more essential for leadership. A strong hegemony is a fundamental
aspect for states to grow properly and to grow strong (Joseph 2002, 22). The concept of hegemony in Gramsci is connected to a union between philosophy and politics (Joseph 2002, 26–7). “Philosophies”, for Gramsci, are tied up with the leading role of intellectuals in shaping organic blocs and normative action’ (Joseph 2002, 27). Gramsci’s writings appear to suggest that there are bases to the claim that there are several philosophies, although this is not meant in a relativistic way. The examination of different philosophical directions must take into consideration the world and the knowledge of the world. Critical realism also accepts this point of view (Joseph 2002, 27). Joseph (2002, 27) concludes that a philosophical direction can only be right if it is able to explain the real world. A philosophical direction is not considered correct because it comes from a certain class, but it could mean that a working-class philosophy is in fact better, if it gives a better (truer, non-ideological) description of the world. The reason that this particular class may have a better philosophy is because there is greater motivation for them to have a true understanding of the world since they have a particular stake in changing society. Being the better philosophy means, for instance, being better able to guide good science; and good science is a prerequisite for being able to change society into a better place for people.

**Hegemony, common people, and philosophy**

According to Gramsci (1975a, 1384–6), intellectuals should organize themselves, together with the ‘common people’ (Mordenti 1996, 52). Gramsci talks often about hegemony and he interprets the world, European and Italian histories as clashes of different hegemonies. Gramsci stressed the role of the intellectuals in keeping and fighting for the hegemony (Mordenti 1996, 52). According to Gramsci (1975a, 1374–5), everybody is a philosopher somehow. Gramsci (1975a, 1375–6) wonders if it is better to think according to some social system (any social system that has been imposed from someone else or from above) or if it is better to think with someone’s own head, to be your own guide without accepting passively an external influence. The answer is that a person is always part of some group; the question is which one? According to Gramsci, it is appropriate to exercise criticism, both on oneself and on philosophy in general (Gramsci 1975a, 1376). The same has been argued concerning self-governance and authenticity. Betzler (2009) argues that evaluation and reaction to change are ways to reach authenticity and to be able to govern our emotions in a world that is constantly changing. According to Gramsci (1975a, 1376), it is also important to know the history and the culture connected to one’s philosophical direction. One cannot know the present if the past is ignored.

As previously mentioned, Gramsci (1975a, 1378) argues that there are several philosophies, among which one is chosen. How do we then choose? Another relevant question for this discussion is also if the ‘real conception of the world’ is given by what is the intellectual position of a person or if it is in his or her actions. The actions are always related to a political direction. So, is philosophy a product of politics? Gouldner (1971, 83–166) has argued that sociology has been influenced by politics, despite the sociologists themselves declaring to be above politics. If one’s actions and thinking do not coincide, this does not necessarily mean that one is being dishonest. To fail to act accordingly to our true self has been considered to be an indication of inauthenticity, which can be more a condition encountered by the individual or a willing act. Salmela (2009) mentions Hochschild,
who fears that inauthenticity is inescapable when it comes to emotional labour, while Betzler (2009) describes how an agent might willingly hide true facts about herself. Gramsci (1975a, 1378–80) connects this mismatch especially to masses, which act in a way that does not pertain to them, but is imposed by some other group. However, authenticity can also pertain to individuals; for instance when a researcher is coerced to sacrifice their critical realist approach in order to be allowed to cooperate with other academics in the same discipline. Most importantly, Gramsci (1975a, 1379) argues how ‘necessary [it is] to fix critically and coherently one’s intuitions of the world and of life […]’ (quanto sia necessario fissare criticamente e coerentemente le proprie intuizioni del mondo e della vita – author’s translation). This is also connected to authenticity, since authenticity has been related to the degree of coherence between one’s inner thoughts and the actions visible to the outside (Guignon 2008), including the working life emotions and tasks (Salmela 2009). There also needs to be a certain grounding in the history of philosophy. This is a very important point made by Gramsci. Even in social sciences, it is important to know where one is going philosophically with an analysis, so that the study is soundly informed.

Finally, Gramsci (1975a, 1385) says that ‘the critical understanding of oneself takes place through a fight of political “hegemonies”, of contrasting directions, first in the field of ethics, then in politics, to finally reach a higher processing of one’s conception of the real’ (la comprensione critica di se stessi avviene quindi attraverso una lotta di ’egemonie’ politiche, di direzioni contrastanti, prima nel campo dell’etica, poi nella politica, per giungere a una elaborazione superiore della propria concezione del reale – author’s translation) (Gramsci 1975a, 1385). Gramsci (1975a, 1385–6) argues that the first step is to be politically conscious and then theory and practice unite. This progresses until the way that one sees world becomes coherent. Conceptualizing hegemony from a political point of view is then a way to be intellectually united and to have a conception of the real that is critical (Gramsci 1975a, 1385–6). As previously discussed, and as it will be later discussed more in detail, this can be interpreted as the union between what is visible to the outside and what is inside. When these two sides are coherent, there is authenticity, as argued by Guignon (2008). Gramsci’s (1975a, 1386) philosophical direction implies that intellectuals unite and organize, as previously mentioned.

Gramsci (1975a, 1389–90) argues that, when contrasting opinions meet, there should be a good argument in response; and that those who cannot successfully hold a discussion have an element of irrational faith in their reasoning. They assume that if something is believed by many, it cannot be wrong. This can also be connected to dynamics of groupthink. The concept itself will be discussed in the upcoming sections of the paper, but the main point is that a group advances what they think is right, to the expense of minority ideas. When an argument is seen as true because believed by many, the person herself does not remember the exact argument, but has heard it several times and remembers it. This person does not really remember the reasons, but she or he knows they exist, because they have been presented before (Gramsci 1975a, 1391). This is reminiscent of certain answers that have been given to me in the academic context: certain ideas and ways to do research were repeated almost mechanically and these approaches were universally advocated, even when they did not fit the particular research context.
The different strata of hegemony

It has been argued that, according to Gramsci, hegemony is grounded in economic structures and it is related to both the economic and ideological level. To understand how Gramsci conceptualizes hegemony, it is helpful to discuss his counterhegemonic strategy, which he was prevented from explicitly mentioning in his notebooks (Im 1991). Gramsci considered hegemony to be the way that a social group is controlled by means of organized consent, instead of the use of violence. This is done by realizing this social group’s interests in a concrete way. As previously mentioned, hegemony has economic grounds; and the class who exercises it should have control over production to make sure that the needs of the subordinate classes are met, sacrificing the dominating class’s interests (Im 1991). Despite the economic aspect, which on its own is not considered enough to achieve hegemony, the dominant class must also have control over the ideological and political structure, which should be formed in a way to favour class compromise (Im 1991). Gramsci also discusses the concept of passive revolution and what is required by the dominant class to maintain their dominant position, even in moments of crisis (Im 1991). Hegemony is also considered to be constantly in a state of struggle. For the non-dominant classes to achieve hegemonic power, they have to organize themselves counter-hegemonically. He suggests a strategy of ‘war of position’, which implies constructing a different historical bloc, and detaching the intellectuals from the other bloc. Gramsci’s strategy implies the development of new ideas, while waiting for a crisis (Im 1991).

Joseph (2002, 19–20) describes a critique that Bhaskar advances to Gramsci’s theories. First is the problem of Gramsci’s view on objectivity, as connected to communism; second is his view on science and knowledge, and their connection to Marxism. However, Bhaskar argues that since Gramsci sees knowledge as dependent on history, it shows that the object of science needs to be separated from knowledge. Gramsci then sees the intransitive domain of scientific enquiry as collapsing into the transitive domain. Furthermore, Gramsci’s conception of science ‘reduces science to an expression of the historical process’ (Joseph 2002, 20). Joseph (2002, 20) also argues – and I agree with him – that while Gramsci does have certain issues in his writings, some his ideas are in line with critical realism.

For instance, according to Joseph (2002, 29), both Gramsci and critical realism assume that reality must be stratified, that is, it must be structured and objective, for hegemony to exist. Hegemony is also seen as needing institutions to be maintained (Joseph 2002, 31). Universities can be seen as such institutions. For a group to achieve hegemony it also needs to stay in its position and it needs to be backed by both economic, political, and cultural conditions allowing this particular group to establish itself as hegemonic (Joseph 2002, 31). This also shows the necessity for universities and its employees to be in line with the hegemonic bloc. This is once again a connection to groupthink dynamics. The fact that academics in an institution have predominant ideas helps retain the hegemonic status. Hegemony in Gramsci’s writings is also connected to structure and superstructure. These are not seen as separate, but united in their formation of a ‘historical bloc’ (Gouldner 1971, 366 as cited in Joseph 2002, 31; Joseph 2002, 31). For a project to achieve hegemony is also necessary to construct the previously mentioned bloc out of different groups and different agents, but this implies that it is necessary to look beyond what these groups do and consider the structures that are behind them. The
differences – which are exploited by the hegemony – are already present in a stratified and differentiated form (Joseph 2002, 31–2).

There are different issues connected to Gramsci’s hegemony. One of them is the previously mentioned historicism. Historical relativism transforms the objective of social science into a kind of historical analysis of different ways of thinking expressed by different groups through different eras in history (Joseph 2002, 34). It is wrong to affirm the opposite as well, in which history has no role in social science. The question is then how to find a balance between the fact that there should be some scientific analysis and the fact that practices and theories that are connected to society do have a historical character (Joseph 2002, 34). Gramsci does not deny this conception of historical reality, because he sees it as ‘structured and differentiated’ (Morera 1990, 83 as cited in Joseph 2002, 34–5). The concept of historical bloc completes the one of hegemony as a ‘unity between structure and superstructure’ (Joseph 2002, 35). A struggle for hegemony should also not be simplified into a class struggle, because it is instead ‘an articulated attempt to preserve and transform […] structures and relations’ (Joseph 2002, 39).

Hegemony is about being in control of the economic, political and cultural aspects of a society, but that is not enough. The group that has the hegemonic status also needs to ensure that the structures that make its dominance possible are reproduced. For instance, a passive revolution is one in which the ruling group in society reorganizes and modernizes. The success of a hegemonic process is then based on structural processes. Hegemony in critical realism is seen as being in operation only if material causality makes it possible. Society as a whole has different structures and mechanisms with their own dynamics (Joseph 2002, 126). To analyse hegemony, there are different aspects that should be taken into consideration: the social groups and classes, their interests, values, and blocs and alliances resulting from them (Joseph 2002, 129).

Joseph (2003) talks about two different kinds of hegemony. One is structural hegemony, which is concerned with the underlying conditions in society; and the other is more practical and concerned with concrete hegemonic projects. The analysis of hegemony requires the examination of social groups, their interests, and world-views. According to Joseph (2003, 135), ‘structural hegemony exists in the space between different social structures and describes the relations between these structures in the process of reproduction necessary for the maintenance of the social formation’. Hegemony related to structure is what makes it possible for certain projects to impose an institutional level fix both in time an in space. Hegemony is both concerned with the constitution of a ruling bloc and with the reproduction of the social structures that make such bloc possible (Joseph 2003).

**Hegemony versus ideology**

Gramsci (1975a, 1380) also poses the problem of a philosophy whose view of the world has become an ideology or something close to a religion. The problem is then to maintain this ideology. To explain this process, Gramsci (1975a, 1381) uses the Catholic Church as an example. For Gramsci (1975a, 1381), the one weak point of certain ideologies is a missing link between common people and the intellectuals.

It is also important to make another distinction. Hegemony is not the same as ideology. Hegemony is a broader concept because it also includes what creates ideologies, such as
institutions. Education is one of those institutions (Joseph 2002, 139). As previously mentioned, this process is also one of the causes of the groupthink dynamics that one can face while operating as an academic. In a hegemonic process, it is not just ideas that are articulated, but also practises such as the ideological and the cultural ones, among others. Gramsci considers that objectivity is only a generalized subjectivity and therefore, it is conditioned by the dominant ideology. This way the transitive and intransitive domains of hegemony are collapsed into each other (Joseph 2002, 159). The conception of objectivity in Gramsci is problematic because it is still connected to ideology and to the hegemonic point of view. Science becomes then nothing more than a kind of ideology and Marxism is then an expression of scientific truth (Joseph 2002, 159). Without a material objectivity, there is no way to say which group and which ideas will be in the leading position. Inter-subjective positions cannot give a satisfying explanation of how a group becomes hegemonic, but only scratch the surface of the issue. The dominant group needs certain conditions to become dominant such as an objective location (related to capital, access to structures, among others) (Joseph 2002, 160). Despite the fact that hegemony can be related to certain social agents encountering each other, this is not enough for the hegemony to realize itself. Different characteristics related to time and space, structures, and relations, among others, are also involved (Joseph 2002, 161). According to Joseph (2002, 161), ‘the theory of hegemony combines the political moment of agency with the structural nature of social reproduction.’

**Education, academia, and hegemony**

When it comes to a strategy for the working class, Gramsci recognizes the importance of education as well as political leadership (Martin 1998, 152 as cited in Joseph 2002, 40). I have already mentioned that Gramsci puts great focus on the role of the intellectuals. Gramsci (1975b, 1516–17) considers intellectuals to be specialized and they are connected to every social group. Intellectuals are important because – along with infrastructure and scientists – they make a country ‘more civil’ (Gramsci 1975b, 1517). Shear (2008) argues that Gramsci conceptualizes two kinds of intellectuals: the organic ones and the traditional ones. The first category includes intellectuals that have specialized knowledge and who give direction to their class’s interests. They know that their actions are political (Shear 2008). This is contrary to the traditional intellectuals who think that they are independent but they are also the products of different historical and class relations. They are also unknowingly the facilitators of ‘political domination and social hegemony’ (Shear 2008, 56). Shear (2008) argues that academics do have agency and also that the academic world is challenged by different happenings such as corporatization of the universities and political groups pressuring academics. He argues that it is specifically the right applying pressure (Shear 2008), however, the pressure can also come from groups pertaining to the left. Shear (2008) also argues that academic activities cannot be separated from political engagements and should not be, following Gramsci’s argument that every activity is embedded in the hegemony. Shear’s (2008) conclusions are that intellectuals, at least in the U.S., are disempowered and their possibilities to practice are reduced. Shear (2008) argues that political engagement can help to fight the hegemonic forces and to ‘work toward developing new imaginings and practices for resistance’ (Shear 2008, 65).
Groupthink in academia

The conceptualization of the intellectuals done by Gramsci and the situation described by Shear (2008) introduce a concept that has been mentioned throughout the paper, which is the one of groupthink.

Klein and Stern (2009) have written an article concerning groupthink behaviour in the academic world. For instance, in the beginning of the article they declare that ‘rules and standards for performance are not separable from support for specific beliefs’ in the academic context (Klein and Stern 2009, 586). The authors argue that social democratic political ideology is prevalent in the social science and humanities. The frictions between this ideology and, for instance, classic liberalism, create attritions in the faculty. This can result in exclusion and marginalization. A similar argument is put forward by Mills (2000, 102–3), when he explains that different schools of thought can become dominant and career advancement can depend on an agreement with the tenets of such schools. He also adds that what he calls ‘cliques’ within the academic context can decide to ignore, but also challenge, an inconvenient outsider (Mills 2000, 112). More recently, Redding (2012) has listed the difficulties that conservative students and academics face in their everyday life at the university. The issues include difficulties in advancing one’s career and in publishing, among others (Redding 2012).

Klein and Stern (2009) consider the term groupthink to be a negative and it is defined as ‘members’ strivings for unanimity overriding their motivation to realistically apprise alternative courses of action’ (Janis 1982, 9 as cited in Klein and Stern 2009, 587). The cases analysed by groupthink scholars mostly deal with policy-making groups. These groups are small, fairly well-defined, with centralized decision making, concerned with secrecy, under great stress, the decisions made involve risks, the group deals with urgent issues, the beliefs are specific to the decision they need to make, the bad beliefs are shallow and there is potential for admitting defectiveness. These characteristics are of course significantly different from those of academia. Academic groups (be it a department at a university or the editorial board of a journal) tend to not be small; they are not that specific, and stress and urgency are not that much in focus. Risk and danger are quite far from such activities. Despite this, they tend to develop groupthink tendencies, as argued by Redding (2012). Mills (2000, 107) describes the previously mentioned cliques in the university context, which are also in charge of defining the terms of a good work and of competition. These cliques are related to job and publication opportunities, as also mentioned by Redding (2012).

Klein and Stern (2009) argue that the beliefs of the academics are deep beliefs, which are rooted in values of moral, political, and aesthetic kind. Even though there are many differences, Klein and Stern (2009) argue that there are certain similarities between the groups described by the groupthink scholars and academia. For instance, both are driven by concurrence and self-validation and both try to exclude beliefs that are not in harmony with the group’s beliefs. The ideological beliefs of academics are developed quite early in life and tend to remain unchanged. The difficulties with groupthink dynamics can arise as early as during the undergraduate period (Redding 2012). Academics are likely to respect colleagues with similar lines of thoughts; whilst they are not likely have much esteem for colleagues whose thought differs from their own. When searching for new members in the faculty or department,
academics are likely to hire candidates, or accept doctoral students, with a similar set of beliefs (Klein and Stern 2009). The beliefs in academia are also very deeply rooted in ‘selfhood and identity’ (Klein and Stern 2009, 589). A similar argument is put forward by Mills (2000, 103) who explains that research institutions are also institutions of training and that ‘certain types of mind’ are selected. Klein and Stern (2009, 597) comment ‘ask yourself whether a student, no matter how solid his research, would be likely to win grants, have his articles published by the most respected journals, and succeed on the academic job market’. Later in the paper, the authors conclude that academics with certain ideologies ‘if they nonetheless try to get on in academia, they find themselves watering down their ideas and cloaking or misrepresented who they really are’ (Klein and Stern 2009, 598).

**The mechanisms of groupthink**

The described groupthink dynamics are a manifestation of the hegemonic setting in the everyday life and they are events that one experiences. However, groupthink has been elaborated as a psychological theory (Janis 1972). Since Janis (1972) work, groupthink has evolved into different theories and explanations for how people act in a group. For instance, Wagner (2013) used one particular groupthink theory to explain the cover-up of sexual misconduct towards children at a university. This particular theory is called ‘Social Identity Maintenance Model’ and it was elaborated by Turner and Pratkanis (1998). These authors underline the fact that groupthink does not have an accepted definition and that many researchers have criticized its validity. Turner and Pratkanis (1998) argue that groupthink can be explained by an attempt by the group to maintain its identity, especially in conditions of threat. The main point is to preserve a positive image of the group. Furthermore, Turner and Pratkanis (1998) also describe some dynamics as the ones presented by Klein and Stern (2009) and by Redding (2012), such as the exclusion and stereotyping of outgroups, which is related to social identity. One of the suggestions advanced by the authors is the protection of the opinions of the minority (Turner and Pratkanis 1998).

In the spirit of interdisciplinarity (Bhaskar, Danemark, and Price 2017), it is also relevant to mention that groupthink is also inferred as a possible result of group dynamics from a neurobiological perspective (Gantt and Agazarian 2011).

These characteristics of groupthink support its conceptualization not only as a series of events and a manifestation in the domain of the empirical, but also in the one of the real, as described by Danemark et al. (2002, 20).

As a concluding remark for this section, it can be said that the situations presented by Klein and Stern (2009) and by Redding (2012) are mainly about political ideologies, such as social democracy or liberalism. However, the situation does not seem to be much different in the case of ideologies pertaining to research and its paradigmatic premises. These situations are therefore similar to the experience that I describe in this paper. The difference is that, instead of my holding a different political outlook to the majority of the academic staff, I hold a different scientific philosophy. Different theories regarding groupthink also support its explanation as a mechanism and its manifestation in terms of hegemonic structures (Joseph 2002, 10–11) in other domains, such as the empirical one.
The question of being and authenticity

The concept of authenticity is widely discussed in tourism. The term has also been used in different humanistic disciplines to describe a way of living that is either ‘optimal or deficient’ (Guignon 2008, 277). Authenticity can be also found in the writings of Heidegger and in ethics.

Under a philosophical point of view, authenticity refers to something that is either the original or very close to the original (Guignon 2008). Something is authentic, in a more everyday meaning, when ‘what-it-is-said-to-be’ matches ‘what-it-is’, as for example, when a painting said to be by Picasso is actually a painting by him. Authentic work is generally considered to hold more value (Guignon 2008). The conception of authenticity related to a person is described by Guignon (2008) as the feelings and beliefs that make one person that person together with the actions that are visible to the outside world. This has been previously mentioned while discussing Gramsci and his mention of the coherence between actions and thoughts. Authenticity is then seen as something of value because we conceptualize it as the potential to realize our fate. Guignon (2008) explains how it has been argued that the concept of authenticity related to the realization of the individual is a modern concept, being earlier connected to some other higher power such as God or the cosmic order. It is generally not considered very authentic to just follow what others do, being just a reflection of others’ expectations (Guignon 2008).

Other conceptions of authenticity are related to the possibility of expressing the feelings that come from deep in the soul. Authenticity has been considered a way to get direction without having to refer to a higher form of guidance. It would be a way to follow our own way (Guignon 2008).

Heidegger, Collier and authenticity

Collier (1999), in his book Being and Worth, sets out to defend the notion of authenticity put forward by existentialists and especially Heidegger. One argument that has been popular against Heidegger is the fact that one may be authentic and yet evil. Heidegger was also criticized by Theodor Adorno on this matter (Ballard 1990). Collier (1999, 103) explains that one may be evil in combination with many other characteristics, such as courage. That does not diminish the worth of courage. Furthermore, Collier (1999, 103) also argues that authenticity is not a virtue but without authenticity ‘all virtues are just splendid vices’. Collier (1999, 103) also explains that existentialism generally does find certain characteristics that are not compatible with authenticity. The example of Heidegger regards manipulative relations.

In his book Being and Time, Heidegger (1996, 1–5) discusses the meaning of being and introduces the concept of Da-sein. According to Heidegger (1996, 30) science is a way for Da-sein to be and by understanding the being of Da-sein, we understand the world. The Da-sein, according to Heidegger (1996, 33), is the most important entity and he wants to know how it could be comprehended. A definition of Da-sein could be the one mentioned by Sartre: ‘a being such that in its being, its being is in question’ (Collier 1999, 103). Da-sein is described in different ways, for instance as subsistence and validity (Heidegger 1996, 5). The Da-sein is conceptualized considering its possibility to be or not to be itself. Guignon (2008) argues that Heidegger refutes the idea that there is a human nature, which decides
how humans should be humans. These possibilities are chosen or they have been found by the Da-sein by growing up, for example.

Heidegger (1996, 35) explains how important time is to understand being. Temporality is what gives the being of Da-sein its sense. Temporality is also the possibility of historicity, which is the way of Da-sein to be (Heidegger 1996, 37). We come from somewhere and we are going somewhere and this is what it means to be human (Guignon 2008). We have certain frames of reference and we have things to accomplish. These frames of reference mentioned by Guignon (2008) seem also to be connected to one of the fundamental assumptions of critical realism, which is that society is seen as structure and it is irreducible to its effects, but it manifests itself through them. Society only exists because of ‘the intentional activity of men’, but it does not cause this activity, nor is it the result of it (Bhaskar 2008, 186). This conceptualizes society as something that pre-exists us when we are born and it means that we act under its structure. When we are born and we grow up, we also learn how societies work, in order to act in society. This is similar to when Bhaskar (2008, 188) argues that we need to acquire a language to be able to read. Therefore, these frames of reference can be said to be our understanding of the society we live in, but, as Bhaskar (2008, 187) argues, men also need to transform these structures (or frames of reference) that they are given.

According to Heidegger, life is the relationship between these two aspects, on the one hand our motivations and our commitments and on the other, all of the eventualities that may have us change our course of action. Inauthenticity is expressed in a person just following the crowd avoiding responsibility (Guignon 2008). Here it is also possible to draw a parallel with Dante. In his Divine Comedy, he punished severely the ones who were not making decisions and he calls them the Uncommitted. He did not reserve for them a place in hell, but he put them in the vestibule, which is a sort of lobby, since he considered them worse than the ones who made bad decisions. They are tortured by insects, which give them the stimuli they never had in life. They also never made any decisions regarding following a certain banner (in the case of Dante, most likely a political one) so now they are forced to follow a banner with no meaning (Alighieri 1991, 31–5; Fowlie 1981, 34–5). Collier (1999, 104) describes the connection by mentioning the German word for authenticity, which is ‘Eigentlichkeit’ and it means ‘ownedness’. Authenticity and inauthenticity are then connected to avowing and disavowing a being. The same connection is done by Guignon (2008). ‘Inauthenticity is ‘washing one’s hands’ of one’s acts, ponziopilatismo, as Gramsci called it’ (Collier 1999, 104).

Collier (1999) relates Da-sein to the concept of Mineness and it refers to the fact that a personal pronoun is always needed to talk about a person (I am, for instance). There is also the issue of the being, which is delivered to us and it can be either won or lost. To win means to be authentic and to lose means inauthenticity. However, to be inauthentic, it does not mean to lose Mineness. According to Guignon (2008), inauthenticity is only one of two possibilities for one to live his or her life. A person can also ‘take over the task of being a clearing by realizing the structure of lived time in his or her actions in a way that is vivid, focused, steady, and intense’ (Guignon 2008, 283). Collier (1999, 110–11) explains how Heidegger considers conscience to be a call. Heidegger (1976, 65) introduces also the concept of authenticity as the ‘appropriation of oneself’. Authenticity and inauthenticity are then ways to be, but inauthenticity does not imply an inferior being, it can be very concrete. Even in its inauthenticity, there is the structure of the existentiality
According to Heidegger (1976, 65), authenticity is a possibility determined by the being’s essence. Inauthenticity does not mean that the Da-sein is not there, but it refers to the possibility of being vivacious, active, curious, and to enjoy life (Heidegger 1976, 65). However, only the way of living that realizes the structure of human lived time is considered to be authentic (Guignon 2008). An authentic life is realized in what Heidegger calls the ‘being-a-whole’, which means to integrate the two dimensions of being thrown into life and the direction that one is taking in life (Guignon 2008), as previously mentioned.

The being of an entity is described as not being an entity itself. He also underlines the importance of history in the concept of being (Heidegger 1976, 447–82). Authenticity is described by Heidegger (1976, 289–324) as living while anticipating death. Understanding death is the way towards an authentic existence (Heidegger, 1976, 318–19). Death is though not just the end of life, according to Heidegger, death is a ‘way of being’ (Guignon 2008). Authenticity is not seen by Heidegger as some kind of individual uniqueness. Instead, it is about ‘achieving and expressing the openness that is the defining potential of Da-sein as such (cursive in the original)’ (Guignon 2008, 285). This means to achieve one’s potential as a human being.

Personal identity or ‘self-constancy’ in Heidegger’s words is described in two ways: ‘the self-constancy of the ‘They’ (inauthentic existence), and that of resoluteness (authentic existence)’ (Collier 1999, 105). To be able to be authentic, the Da-sein should come back from being lost in the ‘They’ and to do that the Da-sein needs to take back the choice (Heidegger 1976, 326). Since the Da-sein is lost in the ‘They’, and first of all it needs to find itself again so it needs to be shown to itself in its authenticity (Heidegger 1976, 326). However, Collier (1999, 105) explains that this protest of Heidegger against the ‘They’ is not a declaration of the individual against the masses, it is not some ‘abstract individualism’ and it is not about doing things in one own way disregarding everybody else.

Collier (1999, 110) also argues that ‘authentic existence is not the business of politics’. The call to conscience that has been previously mentioned, is related to individualism in some way. For instance, in the way that it disconnects us from our comfortable position in the ‘They’ and it forces out of the ponziopilatismo and we have to take responsibility for the choices that we make (Collier 1999, 111). This is once again not a call for individualism as completely separate from everyone else. Collier (1999, 111) argues that it is the ‘They’ and capitalism and this world in which we are thrown that is prone to drive us to individualism. According to Collier (1999, 111) ‘it takes a strong individual stand to ‘swim against the stream’ and seek the good of others’.

The most important argument put forward by Collier (1999, 112) and related to this paper is the one related to the ‘They’ preventing people from realizing their possibilities of being. The ‘They’ leads to an impoverishment through the reproduction of commonplace possibilities. The account of Heidegger’s authenticity we can see it as a sacrifice of the self under the domination of the ‘They’ to be able to realize the maximum compossibles.

**Conclusions**

Collier (1999, 110) also argues that ‘authentic existence is not the business of politics’. The call to conscience that has been previously mentioned, is related to individualism in some way. In my experience, certain of my opinions regarding ontological and epistemological
assumptions are not accepted by several of my colleagues. The questions that have arisen from my recent experience – of trying to have an academic debate on these matters – relate to the possibility of being an authentic academic in a hegemonic setting, while facing groupthink dynamics.

This paper has outlined different aspects of hegemony, Gramsci’s philosophical thoughts and their relation to critical realism, the mechanism and events of groupthink and the role of the just mentioned concepts in education and in the academic context. Furthermore, the philosophical discussion on these concepts has been connected to authenticity and to the daily struggles of the author.

To summarize, I have suggested that the pressure exerted on me to conform to the dominant beliefs, by sacrificing my beliefs and therefore my authenticity, are consistent with the processes outlined in Gramsci’s hegemony. Hegemony is a struggle over the definition and transformation of certain structures. These structures are already present and the conditions that make a hegemonic situation possible are not only about intersubjectivity or class struggle.

Gramsci considers philosophy and politics to be connected and he stresses the role of the intellectuals. The role of universities as educational institutions in perpetuating the hegemonic setting has also been discussed. Intellectuals can help to either maintain or fight the hegemony, probably mainly due to groupthink mechanisms. There are several philosophies for Gramsci, but he does not mean it in a relativistic way. There are different ways to explain the world, but a philosophy is only right if it can explain the real world and if it can help to produce better science. Gramsci also asks himself if philosophy is actually just a product of politics; and he stresses that sometimes actions and thoughts are not coherent, but they nevertheless remain because they are imposed by a dominant group. This discrepancy between thought and action is therefore not necessarily dishonest. Betzler (2009) though, argues that we might as well willingly hide different sides of ourselves, which is indeed a synonym of dishonesty. The definition given by Guignon (2008) does explicitly define authenticity as a coherence between what is inside a person and what they show on the outside. In this paper, I argue that there is often a conflict between being authentic as an academic and being a critical realist. In fact, Gramsci does stress the importance of resolving contradictions in one’s intuitions of the world and life. This resolution can be achieved by adhering to a specific current in philosophical science. The way that we understand the world (philosophy) influences our approach to science.

In the context of hegemony, it is important to challenge dominant ideas and to exercise criticism. This can also be connected to the concept of authenticity and the fact that, to be authentic, one has to separate oneself from the general ideas (the so-called ‘They’) and go one’s own separate way. Hegemony is a constant state of struggle and the non-dominant classes should try to organize themselves in a counter-hegemonic action.

Gramsci stresses the need to have a good argument in the case of contrasting opinions. However, this becomes difficult when academia is dominated by ideology. Gramsci compares ideology to religion. Ideology is not the same as hegemony since hegemony is a much broader concept, but ideology is a part of hegemony. I have already mentioned that Gramsci considers intellectuals to be very important, but he also considers them to be divided in two groups: the ones that willingly direct the class in its interests and the ones that believe they are independent but in fact they are not and they unwillingly
facilitate the hegemony. The author believes that the latter is the category that is most widely spread in the academic context she has encountered. The author sees herself to be part of the first category, but instead of supporting the interests of a class, she is supporting the interests of critical realism and contributing to a passive revolution against hegemony. This has also been discussed in relation to groupthink dynamics and mechanisms and is also related to the argument put forward by Gramsci regarding the repetition of certain ideas without fully reflecting on them. Furthermore, it has been argued that philosophy is connected to politics and consequently academic activities are connected to politics.

The ideological apparatus in academia, as a product of a certain hegemony, can be conceptualized as a result in groupthink as a mechanism, which then manifests itself as groupthink dynamics in the domain of the empirical. An academic whose ideas do not match with the generally accepted ideas risks exclusion and marginalization. The beliefs that can be found in academia are deep and well rooted and those who do not match are, as mentioned, excluded, especially because of the common self-validation and competition in the academic context. The risk for the author is the potential exclusion from publication or the need to hide the critical realist direction to be able to advance in her academic career. The possibility to have to hide one’s philosophical direction is another aspect that is connected to authenticity. On the one hand, to stand by and do nothing is a way to be inauthentic as described by Gramsci, Heidegger and even Dante. On the other hand, to water down one’s beliefs and scientific directions to be able to advance in a career is also considered inauthentic, in the sense that they are not the beliefs one actually has and the ones that are shown to the world. In this case, authentic is not meant as an opposition to inauthentic, but as an unfulfilling of one’s being. This is also seen to be happening in the work place context and the emotions felt there, as argued by Salmela (2009). However, to be authentic does not mean to be one alone against the masses and also authentic existence is said to be separate from politics, but at the same time, a person has a responsibility regarding the choices made.

The choice that I now face is whether to water down my beliefs to be able to advance in my career, or if there is some way to keep some kind of academic authenticity. In response to the problems of discrimination based on political ideology, Klein and Stern (2009) and Redding (2012), Maranto and Woessner (2012) agree with some of the positions on groupthink. However, they propose some solutions to the problems. Conservative academics should avoid displaying their ideas immediately, they should instead concentrate on building a career, avoid conflicts, avoid characterizing themselves as victims and, most importantly, they should be ready to leave if the situation becomes unbearable (Maranto and Woessner 2012). As previously mentioned, the discussion proposed in this article is not related to politics; however, the scenario presented by Maranto and Woessner (2012) is both similar to what I have been trying to do so far and is also discouraging. One should just keep the head down and leave if things do not go as planned. By far, the discovery of Gramsci and his philosophical ideas have been very important for my growth as a critical realist doctoral candidate. Gramsci’s accounts have allowed me to identify the hegemonic situation in which I operated and how to deal with groupthink dynamics from a more informed position: the intellectual who is conscious of her role in the passive revolution. Knowing one’s role is already a great advancement towards a more authentic life. This growth has been further enriched by Wilson’s view on authenticity.
Wilson (2014) thinks that it is possible to manage authenticity and he sees it as a compromise between collective emancipation and our limits. As he expresses it ‘trying to do one’s best in a morally bad world’ (Wilson 2014, 297). Wilson (2014) argues against Margaret Archer in this matter and stresses that sometimes individuals are forced to choose the best option, even if it is not in line with their ultimate concerns. This approach to authenticity should also strive for the betterment of both individuals and organizations. This means striving towards a better alternative of an exploitative system. The realist account of authenticity provided by Wilson (2014) also involves understanding what is in one’s power, and what is not.

I do not have the power to change the entire system in which I operate, but I can put forward critical realism as a way to improve the research in my discipline. Wilson (2014) talks about compromise, and in this case, such compromise would involve adopting different methodological approaches when working with other colleagues. However, in this there is still a risk that I will have to hide certain beliefs in order to please a wider academic audience. This paper is the beginning of my reflection on this issue. Academics operate in a hegemonic setting and there is always going to be a struggle to achieve the hegemonic position. The role of the critical realist is to point out this situation and to try to change it. This would also contribute to an achievement of authenticity, even if, as mentioned, there are compromises involved. My hope is that this reflection will initiate more research into the tensions present in the working environment of critical realists and in the general philosophical struggle that we face every day.

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Notes on contributor

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