AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS OF TRUTH AND POST-TRUTH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GRAMSCI AND FOUCAULT

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the relation between truth and power as described by Gramsci and Foucault. It discusses the way in which post-truth is used in the counter-hegemonic discourses and what the effect of these new discursive form could be. Attention is drawn to the role of intellectuals in the production and dissemination of truth and post-truth in society. As Foucault argues, every society has its own regime of truth, containing specific beliefs, values and mores. He has focused on the way in which this regime is established and distributed in the society. We now face the emergence of an alternate regime, the "regime of post-truth," which tackles the existing regime of truth by using "alternative facts" as weapons. The new type of discourse questions the hegemonic order by creating a certain degree of confusion among citizens, so the way they evaluate the political space is completely changed. Truth, as Gramsci argues, has a very important role in the construction and reproduction of a certain way of life and worldview. This means that the spread of post-truth can affect the way in which individuals think and act in society, as well as the way societies are organized.

Keywords: truth; post-truth; Gramsci; Foucault.

Introduction

This paper seeks to analyze the concept of truth used by Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, with the purpose of generating a discussion around the issue of post-truth and its potential consequences. It starts by considering the way Foucault used this concept and by highlighting the connections between discourse, knowledge and power. This part is important because Foucault can be used to better understand how post-truth discourse could influence individuals and how it could shape their actions and beliefs. In addition, it can offer us a better understanding of the way discourses function. Further on, the article discusses the concept of hegemony as described by Gramsci, and it focuses on the matter of common sense and consent to offer a better understanding of the way discourses influence the formation of hegemony in society.

The paper does not seek to analyze certain post-truth discourses, nor to carry out an in-depth analysis of how they work. It aims to discuss the relation between truth and power from the perspective of Gramsci and Foucault. It also considers the role individuals have in the dissemination of truth in the society, as well as the possible consequences of the emergence of post-truth. The main question the work addresses is why it is important to discuss and analyze the problem of post-truth? The aim is to highlight the potential dangers generated by the emergence of post-truth discourse and to propose a new approach that can be used to understand them, inspired by the two philosophers.

Michel Foucault on Discourse and Truth

Foucault, as Stuart Hall says, was interested in how discourses worked. He changed the way of using the concept of discourse, giving it a different meaning. He was also interested in the rules and practices through which certain meanings were produced and how discourses were regulated. For the French philosopher, discourse is a system of representation (Hall 2001, 73). He proposed that we move away from the linguistic approach and see discourse as a way of representing knowledge about a particular subject at a particular time. Discourse is therefore a way of producing knowledge through language. Hall states that as long as all social practices are based on meaning, and this influences the actions of individuals, all actions have a discursive element. This is precisely why, says Hall, discourse is not only a linguistic element, but also refers to language and practice, thus crossing the boundary between what is said and what is done. Discourses build themes, control how they can be discussed and approached, and influence how ideas are formed and translated into everyday life, affecting the behaviour of individuals. Discourses establish certain rules of speech, define what can be said and how it can be said, limit certain modes of expression and behaviour, and construct knowledge around a certain theme. It must be remembered that discourses do not have a single source, but are dispersed in society. They can appear in different forms, but when they approach a certain theme, they have a similar style, thus constituting what Foucault called a "discursive formation." (Hall 2001, 73–74).

As mentioned above, Foucault claims that objects gain meaning through discourse. We can say that meanings are constructed through discourse. It should be noted here that he does not mean that objects cannot have a material existence outside of discourse, but rather that they come to acquire meaning through discourse. Starting from this idea, he argues that we can only have knowledge about an object if it has a meaning, and meanings, as we said above, are discursively constructed, so discourses are what produces knowledge. Furthermore, the philosopher says that meanings, knowledge, or even truth are closely related to a specific historical context. For him, each period had certain discourses that produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects and practices that differed according to the period in which they were created. Therefore, the knowledge and practices through which subjects are constructed are historically and culturally specific, as Hall concludes. They cannot have meanings outside of discourses, as they are represented by discourse produced by knowledge and regulated by specific discursive practices and disciplinary techniques. (Hall 2001, 74–76)

Foucault asserts that there is a new mechanism of power that allows time and labour to be extracted from individuals, a type of power that is constantly exercised. This type of power was very important in building modern society and industrial capitalism. Foucault calls it "disciplinary power." Modern society is based on two main elements: the first one is legislation, or the discourse through which social life is articulated. The second element consists of a multitude of disciplinary constraints aimed at ensuring social cohesion. So, power in modern society is manifested through public law on the one hand, and through a disciplined mechanism on the other hand. In Foucault's view, we must not understand that there is an explicit legislative system on the one hand and a set of obscure disciplines on the other, because the disciplines have their own discourses that generate knowledge and new "domains of meanings." These disciplines have nothing in common with law, but with certain norms or rules aimed at normalization. Power is therefore simultaneously exercised through law and discourses created or promoted by disciplines that end up invading the area of law, thus creating a "society of normalization" (Foucault 2020, 75–78). In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault says that a regime dominated by this kind of power manifests itself through five operations. First, it creates a space of differentiation for the actions of individuals and devises a set of rules for them to follow. Second, on the basis of these rules, it differentiates individuals from each other; it divides them into rule-followers and rule-breakers, and thus establishes an optimal level of rule-following they must aim at. Third, it measures the activities, level and nature of individuals using quantitative methods and ranks by value. Fourth, by assigning this value, a standard of compliance is established that must be achieved. Lastly, the limits to the "abnormal" are set by the external borders. Sanctions which constantly hover above disciplinary institutions have the role of comparing, hierarchizing, differentiating, excluding and homogenizing individuals, thus reaching what Foucault calls "normalization" (Foucault 1995, 182–183). The "normal" is created through the standardization of

education, through the organization of a national medical profession and of a system of hospitals capable of operating according to general health norms, and through the standardization of industrial processes and products. Along with surveillance, normalization has become one of the instruments of power, even if it has a homogenizing effect; on the other hand, it is individualizing, given the fact that it allows the measurement and determination of levels on the basis of which individuals are differentiated (Foucault 1995, 183–184). While analyzing the relation between discourse and power, Siegfried Jäger identified two points of convergence. The first one is the power of discourse. This means that discourses shape the actions of individuals, the way they interpret the world around them, and their everyday lives. The second point is power over discourse. This refers to the capacity of a certain group to influence the discourse in a society. We can conclude at this point that discourses have two effects: they shape the individual and the consciousness of the society, of the masses, and they determine actions. (Maier & Jäger 2016)

In "Power/Knowledge," Foucault says it is important to remember that truth is not without power either, but is a product of multiple forms of constraints and includes different effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, understood as a type of discourse that tests accepted and functions as a truth. Every society has mechanisms and courts that allow individuals to distinguish between true and false statements. In any society we can find methods by which individuals are sanctioned, techniques and procedures for acquiring the truth, and people who have the role of telling what is true and what is not (Foucault 2020, 131). Foucault says that in contemporary societies, truth has five characteristic elements. It is "centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it," and it is constantly influenced by both economics and politics, in the sense that it is needed for both economic production and political power. Moreover, truth is an object that appears in various forms, disseminated and consumed in society as it circulates through education, through information that is very widespread in society and that overcomes certain limitations. Truth is produced and reproduced in society under the observation and control of political and economic apparatuses, such as the media, universities or the military, and it is the subject of many discussions, debates, and political confrontations. (Foucault 2020, 131–132)

Michel Foucault also discusses the role of the intellectual in the production of truth. This is the person who occupies a certain position in society, and this position is related to the functioning of the "truth apparatus." The intellectual has three specificities: the class to which he/she belongs, his/her life and work thanks to which he/she has acquired the status of an intellectual, and the politics of truth in society. Intellectuals can function and fight at the grassroot level of the truth regime. In society, there is a battle around truth or for truth. The latter, says Foucault, must be understood as the totality of rules by which it is established what is true or false; so, he does not discuss a battle to find out the truth, but a battle for the political and even economic role it has in society. Intellectuals should therefore not concern themselves with contesting scientific practices and the ideology that surrounds them, but with the possibility of establishing a new politics of truth, because the way in which individuals think, their consciousness, should not be changed, but the institutional regime that produces the truth instead. Therefore, it is important to "detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural within which it currently operates." (Foucault 2020, 132–133)

In a discussion with Gilles Deleuze about intellectuals and power, Foucault says that, in the past, intellectuals were the product of two elements: their position as intellectuals in the capitalist system, and their discourse, insofar as it "reveals" a certain kind of truth. These two elements, even though they are different, have never been mutually exclusive, but neither have they necessarily coincided. In recent times, intellectuals have discovered that individuals no longer need them to attain knowledge. Intellectuals continue to be "agents of the power system" in the contemporary period. Their role is no longer to spread the truth to the population, but to fight against the forms of power that transform it into its object or instrument in the spheres of knowledge, truth and, ultimately, discourse (Bouchard 2019). Therefore, Foucault, does not look at intellectuals in terms of science or ideology, but in terms of truth and power. They should be the ones who identify the line of demarcation between the realms of knowledge and power, as put by Goswami (Goswami 2014, 11).

Antonio Gramsci on Power and Hegemony

Gramsci says that a social group becomes hegemonic after it develops a hegemonic plan and after it comes to manifest its moral and intellectual leadership over the other groups in society. Moral or intellectual leadership has consensus and persuasion as its main elements. So, a social class or group is hegemonic when its culture, beliefs and ideology are accepted as universal by the rest of society (Fontana 1993, 140). However, hegemony should not be reduced only to the organization of consensus in society, because coercion and consensus have a direct relationship; they influence each other to the extent that a social group, implementing the hegemonic plan, ends up organizing consensus in society, which later allows it to use the coercive mechanisms of the state. Williams (2020) claims that the universalization of ideology and the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership are in fact necessary conditions to reach the power of the state, and therefore to truly exercise domination over society. Maintaining hegemony also involves the use of force, especially through the media. So, we must bear in mind that sometimes even force is covered by the veil generated by leadership, by the consensus created in society, but that does not mean that force relations are completely excluded from the hegemonic project. However, we must not think that force is as important as consensus either. The latter is more important for the hegemonic process, for the consolidation of power (pp. 94–96).

Let us go back to the concept of leadership as it requires some clarification. First, leadership enables the dominant group to make decisions and act collectively. The individuals who make up these groups can see the social situation as it is, without their view being clouded or distorted by ideology or certain structural constraints. Second, the dominant group must also take into account the values of the dominated groups in order to become, and especially to remain hegemonic. If a dominated group develops the capacity to act collectively and tries to organize a counter-hegemonic plan to be implemented in a war of position, the dominant group will lose recognition. Therefore, a hegemonic group must also include the ideas of subordinate groups in the dominant system of ideas. In addition, we need to understand why some individuals would accept the dominance of others. It is important to know that hegemony does not strictly refer to the imposition of values and meanings, but also to material, economic and political elements. In terms of the "diffusion" or operation of ideology, organizations, says Jones, contribute to the dissemination of the values and meanings that make up the dominant "Weltanschauung." Civil society is where the struggle for hegemony takes place and is also a key element in maintaining it, given that it blurs the line between political authority and everyday life. (Jones 2008, 46–48)

Important in the development of the link between civil society and the state is the role of the intellectual. It consists in ensuring both a vertical link between the two superstructural levels and a horizontal link between the groups in society. Intellectuals are described by Gramsci as those who shape or rather "organize" both consensus and repression in society. Any hegemonic group relies on a cultural system constructed by intellectuals to remain hegemonic (Haugaard & Lentner 2006, 29). Gramsci makes a distinction between traditional intellectuals or "professionals" who are at the intersection of the two strata of society, and whose position is due to historical class relations. The second type of intellectuals, the "organic" ones, are not distinguished by their profession; they do not have a certain well-defined function, but they are the ones who have the role of organizing society and who articulate, formulate and direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they belong (Gramsci & Hoare 1985, 131). Each social class, as we said above, needs people with the role of homogenizing and developing class consciousness. Organic intellectuals are created by each class as it forms and develops. On the other hand, any group that emerges from the economic structure found at its formation a category of intellectuals that had historical continuity, passing over even radical changes in society. The most common category of intellectuals of this type are those who belong to the clergy. They had a monopoly on important "services," such as ideology, philosophy, science, etc., and it was organically linked to the aristocracy. Moreover, the intellectuals belonging to this category had a status identical to that of the aristocracy. Given the historical continuity of traditional intellectuals, they constitute a separate group from the dominant one (Gramsci & Hoare 1985, 135–138). Gramsci says that there are "historically formed categories of expertise" through which intellectuals exercise their function. They are associated with all social groups, but the ties with the more important groups are closer as they influence their development to a greater degree. Furthermore, according to Gramsci, any group that aims to become dominant tries to assimilate

or ideologically "conquer" traditional intellectuals. This process is effective only when the group succeeds in developing its own organic intellectuals. In the production of intellectuals, education plays the main role; it is the tool by which they are generated (Gramsci & Hoare 1985, 141–143). The knowledge that intellectuals possess is transformed into action or policy only when it is connected to the experiences or passions of individuals. Intellectuals have the role of filtering and mediating the experiences and passions of individuals. The relationship between individuals and intellectuals, between knowledge and passion functions as a catalyst that generates a synthesis of the two types of consciousness. This relationship between passion and knowledge underlies the distinction between "common sense" and "common sense." The first concept refers to an incoherent, ambiguous opinion that nevertheless contains true elements, or rather elements that have become true through their reproduction. Common sense, however, is a combination of common sense which is rather the result of passion, and knowledge and reason. Common sense is the result of coherent thought generated by the production of intellectuals. The latter are the ones who mediate the transition from incoherent to coherent thinking. They are of paramount importance in replacing common sense or an outdated "Weltanschauung." (Fontana 2015, 58–59).

Gramsci and Foucault on the Problems of Truth and Post-Truth

As presented above, both Gramsci and Foucault are interested in how power relations work, how power functions from below, how it becomes universal, and which practices are important in the process of universalization and in the production of hegemony. As Demirović argues, discourses, truth and knowledge are important elements of the apparatus that works for the development of hegemony. There is a strong link between knowledge, truth and power in both Gramsci and Foucault's perspective. The latter sees truth as an element of power, a system that produces, regulates, and impacts the circulation of discourses. This productive system has a very strong connection with capitalism. We can understand here that truth is not only a mechanism that excludes individuals who do not follow certain rules of discourse, but also a point of social struggles (Demirović 2015). In this case, the struggle is about the political and economic roles of truth. Here Foucault raises an important question: Does this struggle lead to a new order of truth? It is important to note that, similar to Gramsci, Foucault links the question of truth to the status of intellectuals in a society and to their practices. In this case, intellectuals are the ones who are fighting for the order of truth, in the sense that they are those who are trying to impose the rules used to distinguish false statements from true ones. In Gramsci's view, intellectuals have a crucial contribution to the production and reproduction of knowledge and feelings in a society; they are the ones who influence the relation between common sense and good sense and who are fighting for the universalization of truth (Demirović 2015).

Gramsci sees truth as part of the process through which consensus is generated in society. Truth is productive, in the sense that it contributes to shaping the way in which individuals think, feel, and act. Truth either generates cohesion in the way people think, or it creates confusion and thus contributes to the formation of a silent acceptance of the social order. On the one hand, truth is transitory, i.e. it is transformed or replaced historically. On the other hand, it is universalized, i.e. certain worldviews of a social class become dominant and universal through it. The concepts that form the universalized worldview are the ones that determine the way people think and act (Demirović 2015). To conclude here, Gramsci sees that the hegemonic battle does not involve only material practices, but it also has a discursive form; and knowledge is central to the discursive battle for hegemony. As argued above, intellectuals also play a crucial role in the hegemonic battle in the process of articulating and universalizing discourses. Furthermore, the question of leadership becomes important, because the hegemonic group exercises its leadership over the subaltern groups. While Foucault is more interested in the relation between knowledge, discourse and power, and focuses on discursive practices and on their influence on the individual's everyday life, Gramsci is more interested in the social conflicts generated by those practices (Demirović 2015).

The article now moves towards post-truth and its potential implications. Newman sees post-truth as a new paradigm in politics, a tool that is used to blur the line between true and false statements. Post-truth does not necessarily refer to the habit of lying, but it is far more complex; it is a process that

can lead to the loss of the symbolic value of truth. It is a process of relativization of truth and involves constant attacks on media, as Newman argues. In this process, scientific evidence is contested by using alternative narratives and the result is an atmosphere of confusion among individuals (Newman 2022). Prozorov views post-truth as a process of relativization aimed at media and truth itself by arguing that truth is nothing else but an expression of the media (Prozorov 2019). Post-truth aims at generating cognitive dissonance, a generalized confusion about what is true and what is false. This leads to the creation of a distorted image of the political space, and it erases any sense of certainty about the world. Alternative facts are mobilized in this sense and are used as weapons by counter-narratives (Newman 2022).

Post-truth is not just an alternative discourse to the hegemonic discourse that exists in society nowadays; it is an attempt to fully change the way people act in society. The regime of truth is contested by a regime of post-truth which aims at creating new rules about how we perceive the world. In a Gramscian sense, there are certain organic intellectuals who are now working towards universalizing this new type of discourse by using the techniques described above. This new emerging regime of post-truth changes the procedure through which statements are produced, regulated and distributed in society by contesting science and media. The problem of media is important because, according to Foucault, the latter are an instrument which distributes the discourse in the society. Media are the place of political debate and social and ideological struggles; their importance lies in distributing the regime of truth (Harsin 2015). Media, according to Gramsci, are an important element of any cultural hegemonic programme. They are a mechanism of universalization and distribution. Of course, when discussing media, the paper does not strictly refer to the traditional media, but to social media as well. Going back to post-truth, the blurring effect they have can, if we follow Gramsci, lead to social tensions between certain groups. Furthermore, post-truth can be used as a new mechanism of legitimization by a new social group that wishes to become hegemonic. Hegemony, as mentioned earlier, is developed through discourses and through a mechanism of mediating and shaping the systems of beliefs in order to install a new worldview or a new common sense.

Conclusion

Going back to Michel Foucault, one can say that the relation between truth and post-truth discourses and democracy is complex. On the one hand, democracy enables the emergence of post-truth discourse by offering everyone the right to speak. On the other hand, as Prozorov claims, it is only in democracy where truth can become unnecessary. This means that democracy threatens its own existence by allowing post-truth to appear and develop, because democracy cannot function without truth (Prozorov 2019). This is why the problem of post-truth is important and needs to be further discussed. Post-truth could lead to a complete shift in the way knowledge is produced and distributed in society. Furthermore, it shapes the way people perceive the world around them and modifies their actions. We can use as an example the riots that took place at the U.S. Capitol after Donald Trump lost the elections. The denial of Joe Biden's victory, the whole post-truth discourse that surrounded the elections led to this event. Furthermore, post-truth is not only used to determine how people think and act; it is also used by certain groups to become hegemonic. It is part of the hegemonic project, and thus can lead to new social conflicts in the society. Post-truth is not just a powerless discursive practice that can be overlooked as an isolated phenomenon; it is a discourse that shapes worldviews and actions and creates a new common sense, a new hegemony.

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