Hegemony and Autonomy

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This article analyzes the concept of hegemony and examines its relationship to power and autonomy. Refuting the conventional belief that it is ideology that distinguishes hegemony, the article argues that it is autonomy that constitutes the distinguishing characteristic. Although hegemons tend to evolve into imperialists, hegemony involves leadership of an alliance, not domination by coercion. It is impossible to conceptualize hegemony without also including autonomy. In this conceptualization, the primary source of autonomy lies in a specific hegemonic system of domination that itself embodies the notion of autonomy for both the polity and its citizenry, a limiting construction that hinders the tendency toward imperialism. Such a system includes one type of autonomy that can be designated as autonomy within hegemony. In addition, the article discusses two other types of autonomy: counterhegemony and a largely power-based opposed hegemony. Thus, the article concludes, hegemony is a complex concept, with several types of manifestation, that can more usefully be understood in connection with autonomy and power than as a stand-alone concept.

Scholars from various traditions have increasingly turned in recent years to the concept of hegemony to provide an angle from which to view the conduct and organization of political life. Politics presupposes conflict among groups with different material interests, separate identities and ways of thinking and unequal power. In part, as a result of their greater power, some groups rise to positions of domination over others. In some circumstances, certain groups achieve positions of dominance based on their ability to persuade others and to provide leadership. Usually, some mix of performance skill, persuasion and power combine to provide a system of domination, and hegemony refers to this, with emphasis on the non-violent and particularly speech aspects. Despite arrangements of domination, the contentious character of politics persists because dominant groups tend to strive for complete domination and subordinate groups tend to seek greater advantage, often even laboring to gain dominance. In the international arena, leading powers tend to strive to shape the international system, some aiming at empire, although more often than not they are checked by other major powers.

This article explores the concept, functions and limitations of hegemony, particularly as it applies to international politics and to state formation and decay. Inasmuch as hegemony is understood by most writers to embrace ideology as both guide to action and justification for a system of domination, the analysis includes attention to ideology. Furthermore, part of the analysis examines autonomy, in juxtaposition with hegemony, both as a means of getting at the character and limitations of hegemony and as a way of viewing hegemony from the perspective of subordinate groups. While mainly characterized by conceptual analysis, the argument is illustrated with historical developments in the last century and a half or so.
The article is devoted primarily to conceptual clarification, with two results. First, hegemony is shown to be more complex than most writers portray it. At the same time, by relating hegemony to power, the concept can clearly be distinguished from empire. Additionally, the analysis reveals that, in contrast to its usual representation, hegemony is not distinguished by ideology but rather by autonomy. Ideology accompanies all systems of domination; whereas, autonomy uniquely goes with hegemony. Second, the analysis shows that, in relationship to hegemony, autonomy takes three types of form: autonomy within hegemony, counterhegemony and opposed hegemony. In addition to these clarifications, the article also briefly examines the formation of autonomy and the sources of hegemony.

**Hegemony and Domination**

Scholars of international politics use hegemony in different ways, primarily as either domination or leadership. In his recent magisterial treatment of great power politics, Mearsheimer (2001, pp. 40–2) defined a hegemon as a state that dominates all others, but he stressed the limitations of hegemony. He claimed that, for all practical purposes, a state could become at most a regional hegemon, so jealous of its position that it would oppose any other state aspiring to hegemony in a different region. Although he cited Gilpin (1981), who had treated hegemony as leadership rather than domination, Mearsheimer did not incorporate a leadership interpretation in his analysis. Instead, he followed Wohlforth (1993, p. 12), whom he also cited, who equated hegemony with preeminence ‘which in the final analysis rests on power’.

Referring briefly to usage of the term among the ancient Greek city-states as leadership, Gilpin (1981, pp. 144–5) noted that the succession of hegemonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might be an interlude, as was the ancient Greek situation briefly, in an ‘ongoing imperial impulse’. In short, he distinguished between a cooperative arrangement among allies led by one of them and a unified arrangement with a dominant authority. Gilpin’s concern was mostly with the organization of the international political economy, especially liberal arrangements that he analyzed under the rubric of hegemonic stability theory (HST). Gilpin (2001, pp. 93–7) drew on Kindleberger (1973) who first put forward the idea that a single economic power needed to provide leadership to make the liberal international economy work, and he noted that the designation HST was first used by Keohane (1980). In this arrangement, the hegemon provides public goods such as a stable currency, capital investment finance, coordination of macroeconomic policies among the leading powers, lending during crises and – more controversially – security. Not all observers accept that security is a public good.

Keohane’s focus on hegemony placed it in a framework of hegemonic decline (Keohane, 1984), reflecting the widespread perception of scholars in the late cold war period that the United States had passed its zenith by the mid-1970s, following its decision to end the dollar/gold standard in 1971, its military withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, the imposition in 1973/4 of increased prices for petroleum by the oil-producing states and the internal difficulties evidenced in the Watergate scandal and Vice President Spiro Agnew’s and then President Richard M. Nixon’s
resignations. Dealing with Kindleberger and Gilpin, Keohane also brought in
Marxism through Wallerstein (1974; 1979; 1980) and, in the case of Gramsci’s
thought, through Cox (1981). In Keohane’s formulation, ‘The hegemon plays a
distinctive role, providing its partners with leadership in return for deference’
(Keohane, 1984, p. 46). Referring explicitly to Gramsci, he argued that ‘American
hegemonic leadership in the post-war period presupposed a rough consensus ... .
This consensus can be viewed ... as the acceptance by its partners of the ideologi-
cal hegemony of the United States’ (Keohane, 1984, p. 137).

These varied treatments of the concept call attention to the need to distinguish
between domination in the absence of hegemony and the utility and functions of
hegemony in achieving and sustaining domination. In addition, the two sources
referenced by these writers – ancient Greek practice and Gramsci’s analysis – appear
to be dealing with separate phenomena, the first with alliances among states and
the latter with politics within coherent, defined communities. These separate
phenomena, in turn, raise the question of the meanings of consensus and com-

munity, both of which imply some sharing of ideas or ideology. Agreements in the
context of participants free to choose imply further that some sort of autonomy
may exist in both international systems and communities, but that concept, too,
holds levels of meaning that are not obvious. Finally, the meaning of shared
ideas and ideology needs to be explored and placed in the context of politics,
which always involves struggle and conflict, and in the context of power, which
always privileges some ideas over others. All of these matters are treated in the
following discussion, most in subsequent sections of the article. The remainder of
this section is devoted to distinguishing between hegemonic and nonhegemonic
domination.

Tyranny and despotism are ancient words referring to domination without consent,
and authoritarianism and totalitarianism offer twentieth-century terms for the
modern expression of similar phenomena. Imperialism and colonialism have been
carried forward to refer to nonconsensual domination between states in which the
interests of the dominant power are served exclusively. The terms ‘dictatorship’
and ‘predatory state’ provide latter-day designations for political systems organized
to serve private interests.

In contrast, both ancient and modern vocabularies include the term democracy to
refer to systems of domination characterized by participation and consent of citi-
zens in the affairs of the state. Despite the view of some that a democracy should
not be considered a system of domination, the structural and policy agendas of
certain groups within such systems prevail over the preferences of other groups.
To cite but one example out of many that could be given, atheists and religious
minorities often live in political systems that are largely run by majority groups
with a specific religious affiliation that shapes structural arrangements and poli-
cies. Even though such systems of domination include dominant and subordinate
groups, they also provide for politics in which struggle and debate remain possible
in a forum from which violence has been excluded (Fontana, 2002). Generally,
well-ordered states, which imply conceptions of public or common good and a civil
society sector, may be included within the category of hegemonic systems of dom-
ination. Both the Roman empire and the cold war system of alliances headed by
the United States have been characterized by historians as consensual empires (Ando, 2000; Gaddis, 1998).

In distinguishing between these types of systems of domination, the difference apparently does not lie in ideology because many exemplars of nonhegemonic systems have clear ideologies as attributes. Nazism included both an ideology that provided guidance for its personnel and the institutions that put the proclamation of racial superiority into effect. At a time of crisis for Cambodia in the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge assumed power under an ideology of creating a new man, a variant of communist ideology not wholly dissimilar to that espoused by Stalin in the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong in China, using extreme violence to implement its program, a practice also not dissimilar to that of the other cited dictators. The presence of ideology in both nonhegemonic and hegemonic systems of domination poses the question of whether there are different types or uses of ideology, or whether the distinction between these kinds of systems lies elsewhere.

As we shall see below, it is impossible to separate the concept of hegemony from consent. Thus, even though there may exist systems of domination in which an ideology serves as guide and justification, those systems are inconceivable without conceding to those groups that are dominated at least such measure of autonomy as implied in their giving of consent. Furthermore, consent carries with it the connotation of freedom because, if consent can be given, it can also be withheld. Taking an additional step, such a system also must include politics in which discussion and debate are possible, otherwise a system of domination is a nonhegemonic one because it is based solely on violence.

For the remainder of this article, the systems of domination without hegemony will be set aside, bracketed, except for the occasional reference to such systems in order to illustrate a contrast with hegemony. Thus, domination by power alone, either in an empire or in a totalitarian state, does not qualify in this discussion as hegemony. Neither does the analysis treat general international relations among independent, autonomous states. Attention focuses on those relationships of alliance in which there interact both a leader and those who are led. Nevertheless, hegemony can never be separated from power because politics involves power. Politics works through both violence and rhetoric. To examine the relationships among these and the way that they work means that in establishing and sustaining hegemonic systems, the first task is to explore the meaning of hegemony.

**Hegemony**

As noted, hegemony has two sources in political thought: ancient Greeks and Gramsci. In this section I shall examine how these sources treated the concept. In addition, I will draw on some contemporary writers who have fused the two by demonstrating continuity in political thinking from the ancient world to the modern. Nowhere in this body of literature about hegemony does there appear any confusion between domination by force and violence, on the one hand, and hegemonic domination implying leadership, rhetoric, and autonomy on the other.

On the whole, the city-states in ancient Greece were primarily inward looking and concerned with constructing a certain kind of polity and citizenship. Yet, the states
'were always in a condition of rivalry, a kind of contest, above all, in the struggle for hegemony', wrote Ehrenberg (1960, p. 92). In general, a state with a preponderance of power exerted leadership, but the Greek conception included an alliance between a hegemon and its allies. As such, Ehrenberg (1960, pp. 113–4) argued, such an alliance required three essential elements: (1) a dual structure of hegemonic state and allies; (2) no common citizenship, the individual always remaining a citizen only of his own state; and (3) a tendency for autonomy of allies to be reduced over time and for the hegemon to assume a position of domination in an empire. Thus, under Athens ‘the two principles of hegemony and autonomy never reached final harmony’ (Ehrenberg, 1960, pp. 116–7), and Athens, with the support of factions within the respective states, tended to interfere in the internal affairs of its allies.

The Greek historians analyzed and contemplated hegemony, and their writings demonstrate the complex relations of power and other considerations in the politics of leadership. Wickersham’s treatment of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon’s *Hellenica* and the fragments from Ephorus portrays a process of bargaining in which ideas and policies play a prominent role (Wickersham, 1994). Herodotus focused his attention on Sparta’s command of the Greek coalition against Xerxes. What Wickersham (1994, pp. 1–3) made clear was that the hegemon, Sparta, was chosen by the allies following a debate and that Athens’ willingness to give way on its command of the sea was critical to the choice. Furthermore, the matter was settled on the basis of willingness of allies to take orders from the hegemon, not on the basis of material resources and strategy (Wickersham, 1994, pp. 9–13). Power, in this interpretation, figures importantly in the bargaining but does not settle the question of which state becomes the hegemon. In Herodotus’ judgment, Athens should have been honored for being more responsible than Sparta for the success of Greek resistance to Persian attack; in Wickersham’s view (1994, p. 18), it was in this war that the foundations for later Athenian hegemony were laid. It was left for Thucydides to analyze this phenomenon of hegemonic succession.

Thucydides’ interest in hegemony was prompted by his view that it marked a stage on the way to empire, and he based his analysis on the Athenian self-justification and analysis of the bases for Athens’ power, largely in the speeches of Pericles (Wickersham, 1994, p. 43). That argument included the circumstances of the Persian War that enabled them to make a critical contribution, but it also stressed the acumen of Athenian commanders and the ‘zeal and boldness of the Athenian people’. Pericles defended the Athenian empire against its critics and, while clarifying the differences between hegemony and empire, put forth the view that empire was superior. Furthermore, he cloaked his views in emphasizing the role that honor and glory played, and he made the case that empire provided better security than hegemony (Wickersham, 1994, pp. 64–6, 70). Note that these speeches, although explanatory, were designed mainly to convince and mobilize the Athenians.

Thucydides agreed that empire was preferable to hegemony, but he also stressed other important considerations. He attributed Athens’ loss in the Peloponnesian War to its internal politics and the ensuing deterioration in leadership. In addition, he pointed out that other states felt quite discontented about being dominated by Athens (Wickersham, 1994, p. 71).
Athens had risen to become hegemon, only to lose the Peloponnesian War to Sparta, which became the new hegemon, but which then failed to retain the position because it engendered hatred from its allies (Wickersham, 1994, pp. 87–96). In Xenophon’s *Hellenica*, the historian identified the problem as one of the hegemon’s inability to behave with respect for the autonomy of its allies. The autonomy problem ‘is intimately involved with the hegemony-problem because violations of autonomy were, in his [Xenophon’s] eyes, a chief bogey for hegemons in this period’ (Wickersham, 1994, p. 97). Xenophon regarded hegemony as providing stability to Greece, but he also thought that in the end the Greeks failed by confusing it simply with power, overlooking the fact that hatred from mistreated allies could fracture the hegemony (Wickersham, 1994, p. 118).

Ephorus wrote the first general history of Greece in 30 volumes, but only fragments remain. In this circumstance, Wickersham tried to reconstruct Ephorus’ thinking about hegemony by relating the fragments to the thoughts of others who wrote about hegemony in the same period: specifically Isocrates, Demosthenes and Diodorus Siculus. Even though this method did not assure certainty (Wickersham, 1994, pp. 159–77), it provided interesting observations about the concept of hegemony, its essential components and its relationship to power. Isocrates addressed hegemony as a matter of justice, regarding persuasion rather than compulsion to be the essential requirement for gaining and retaining allies (Wickersham, 1994, pp. 141–2). Additionally, his views coincided with those of Ephorus in believing that education (*paideia*) and reason (*logos*) were essential in a hegemon. These views were also expressed by Demosthenes (Wickersham, 1994, p. 144). Wickersham (1994, pp. 144–59) also thought that the views of Ephorus and Diodorus Siculus overlapped on the question of the decline of a hegemon as a result of its ceasing to exercise the virtues of leadership and of declining ‘into luxury and complacence’.

To summarize the views of hegemony from ancient Greece, the following propositions seem clear. Although hegemons tend to evolve into imperialists, hegemony involves leadership of an alliance, not domination by coercion. It is impossible to conceptualize hegemony without also including autonomy. The Greeks never solved the problem, but a successful hegemon has to respect the autonomy of its allies; failure to do so engenders hatred from those allies who can then fracture the hegemonic alliance. In addition to this interallied weakness, a hegemon may undermine itself by internal politics that lead to decay within the state. To perpetuate a hegemonic alliance, the hegemon needs to continue to exercise virtuous leadership, particularly by making sensible policy decisions and by mobilizing its citizenry to devote themselves to the state’s objectives. Power remains an important ingredient, providing a crucial component in bargaining but also tempting the hegemon to develop toward an empire through domination. Moreover, power is clearly not separable from circumstances, strategic thinking, education and virtue.

There are connections between the ancient Greek view of hegemony and the more modern source derived from Gramsci, but the latter largely assumes a stable social order in which a group or social class provides ‘“intellectual and moral leadership” (direzione intellettuale e morale)’ (Femia, 1987, p. 24, quoting Gramsci, 1971, p. 39).
This leadership is constituted largely by persuasion and consent when the leading group ‘articulates and proliferates throughout society a cultural and ideological belief system whose teachings are accepted as universally valid by the general population’. Such an ideological belief system brings together philosophy and rhetoric and is organized through intellectuals who are the instruments of a dominant class in gaining acceptance for their ideas and values (Fontana, 1993, p. 140). Although Gramsci stressed the ideological component of politics within the state, force and coercion remained (Bobbio, 1988, p. 82), but this was a state in the Aristotelian and Hegelian traditions in which it is defined as ethical (Fontana, 2000, p. 314). Linking the coercive with the ideological, Joseph (2002, p. 139) averred, ‘... hegemony is broader than just ideology in that it encompasses not just ideological processes but the material forces that generate these ideologies. This includes a wide range of social practices, the institutional ensemble of the state, its repressive apparatus, education, welfare, economic processes, national institutions and so on’. This formulation draws attention to the fact that political and ideological struggles occur within institutionalized systems of domination. So long as such systems remain stable and intact, the leading group and its ideology are likely to persist.

Even within stable systems, however, components of the dominant coalition may reconstruct their understandings of explanations and objectives. For example, over the past 40 years or so the ideas of von Hayek (1944, 1960, 1972, 1979) and Friedman (1982) have come to prevail over those of Keynes (1936) and his supporters within the stable systems of the United States and Britain. In Gramscian analysis, such contention is treated as ordinary or ‘small politics’, in contrast with revolutionary or ‘grand politics’ in which a new (counter)hegemony is established (Gramsci, 1975, pp. 1563–4). I will elaborate below that this sort of shift occurs within a stable hegemonic system and thus does not represent the sort of radical difference in ideas that counterhegemony implies. Nevertheless, under certain conditions, to be treated below, such contentious politics within dominant groups leads to state crisis and breakdown, at which time various groups contend for supremacy. In this situation, the leading groups may strive to form alliances with other cooperative groups but may also mark other groups for suppression or annihilation by violence.

Fontana (2001) extended Gramscian analysis to the contemporary international sphere, emphasizing the debates that take place within civil society and its relationship with the state. He also drew attention to the role that the United States had claimed as ‘the representative and carrier of the ideals of political liberty and economic progress’ (Fontana, 2001, p. 19). In a formulation similar to what Nye (1990; 2002), who invented the term, called ‘soft power’, Fontana (2001, p. 21) stated, ‘To obtain one’s ends in a situation of conflict without resorting to war – that is, by diplomatic, economic, ideological or moral/intellectual methods – is the distinguishing mark of a hegemonic power’. At the same time, the leader of the power bloc, which exercises hegemony in today’s world, also puts forth a category of exclusion: rogue states and states supporting terrorism.

The modern Gramscian view of hegemony grows out of Marxian class analysis, stresses intellectual leadership and domination, largely places itself conceptually
within the politics of the state and does not draw a sharp distinction between hegemony and empire. While obviously dealing with some of the same concerns as the ancient Greek historians, it differs in significant ways. For example, systematic consideration of autonomy is completely absent even though it is assumed. For example, Gramsci (1971, p. 9) held that every person was, in some sense, an intellectual with the ability to think about politics. At the same time, however, he placed intellectual activity within the politics of systems of domination and class conflict. Also missing from Gramscian analysis are concerns with virtue, policy and strategy and other qualities that characterize the agents themselves. Both views emphasize politics and rhetoric as important components in forging and maintaining alliances.

In relating Gramsci to the ancients, Fontana (2000, pp. 308–9) wrote that ‘[i]t is only in a political community such as the polis that the logos as ἡγεμόν would be capable of generating consent by means of the persuasive and rhetorical devices of public speaking’. In this, he followed Isocrates, who ‘conceived of Hellas as a cultural unit ... [which] provided the ground on which the competitive and fiercely ambitious Greek city-states could come together’ (Fontana, 2000, p. 312). Such a contention seems problematic, nonetheless, as illustrated in Fontana’s treating the relationship between Gramsci and Machiavelli on the question of territorial expansion, where he discussed the growth of the Roman empire. He wrote, ‘... the hegemonic power must confront and resolve the problem of language, culture and ethnicity: as it grows and expands in territory and as new populations are assimilated, some kind of common language and common culture must emerge if the new political order is to endure ...’ (Fontana, 2000, p. 321). The difficulty here appears to be that hegemony is being treated both as the generation of organized power within an established community and as the construction of such a community out of fragments that have been brought together only by force. The latter relates more to a consensual empire, such as the Romans’ developed over time, and may be differentiated from an alliance among Greek city-states like those led by Sparta and Athens, respectively, in which autonomy figured prominently under hegemony. When autonomy ceased, the arrangement had already been transformed from hegemony to empire. Such a fairly clear distinction between the two arrangements has persisted from Herodotus and Thucydides (Wickersham, 1994, pp. 20–1, 26) to Gilpin (1981, p. 145). I will return to the concept and complications of autonomy and the relationship between it and hegemony, but I will first take up the concept of ideology, which is very closely associated with the Gramscian position on hegemony.

Ideology

Ideology is a modern term, dated by most writers from the French and American Revolutions (Gamble, 1998, p. xiv), the word having been coined in France by Antoine Destutt de Tracy and uttered in public for the first time in 1796 (Heywood, 1998, p. 6). Clearly related to and involved in politics, ideologies offer ‘a perspective through which the world is understood and explained ... [and] set goals that inspire political activity’ (Heywood, 1998, pp. 3–4). Although not very coherent as political philosophies, ideologies are fairly systematic and provide means of mobilization and political cohesion. Mainly associated with domination, ideologies may
also be employed by groups aspiring to domination. In Heywood’s words, ‘Ideology ... brings about two kinds of synthesis: between understanding and commitment and between thought and action’ (Heywood, 1998, p. 12). Along similar lines, Thiele (1997, p. 17) wrote, ‘The term ideology pertains only to those beliefs and values systematically connected to each other within some coherent scheme that reinforces and is reinforced by relations of power in society’. He identified essential characteristics: ‘To become powerful social forces, ideologies must exhibit at least four features. [They must be] ... comprehensive ... consistent ... plausible ... [and] useful ...’ (Thiele, 1997, p. 218). Arendt (1998/1967, p. 555) regarded ideologies as a mid-twentieth century phenomenon, associated with Hitler and Stalin, and absolutely coherent for believers. She wrote, ‘Ideologies – isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise – are a very recent phenomenon ...’. All of these formulations assume human agency and political action.

There is another structural conception derived from Althusser (1971; 1979/1965) in which ideology is embedded in state institutions that turn individuals into subjects (Althusser, 1971, p. 160). As pointed out by Ricoeur (1994) and Smith (1984, p. 132), Althusser thought that ideology ‘is like the unconscious – “immutable” in its structure and operation’ (Althusser, 1971, pp. 151–2), thus having no politically acting agent. More explicitly, Althusser (1979/1965, p. 233) wrote, ‘In truth, ideology has very little to do with “consciousness” ... . It is profoundly unconscious, even when it presents itself in reflected form’. Similarly, some followers of Foucault (1980; 1983) employ a notion of ‘discourse’ that creates subjects and turns them into objects of impersonal, non-agential forces. In this article, I have set aside this formulation, concentrating on ideology as a tool used by the participants in political struggles for domination and influence.

Returning to ideology as a tool of political action, the use of ideas, stories, explanations and words both to guide political action and to justify claims to domination had been practiced millennia before the term ideology was coined. Before philosophy was invented, the Greeks and other civilizations had employed myths in the same manner as modern people involved in politics use ideology. Lincoln (1999, p. xii) made an impressive case in his ambition to ‘develop a view of myth as ideology in narrative form’. In untangling the evolution of the terms in ancient Greece in which the meanings of mythos and logos were reversed, Lincoln embraced a perspective that related speech to politics and power relations. He wrote, ‘... the most ancient texts consistently use the logos to mark a speech of women, the weak, the young and shrewd, a speech that tends to be soft, delightful, charming and alluring, but one that can also deceive and mislead. ... it is absent from the battlefield and the assembly place ...’ (Lincoln, 1999, p. 10). In contrast, mythos was the speech of the strong in war and law (Lincoln, 1999, pp. 13–4). Lincoln presented the story of two reversals, the first ‘when Plato stigmatized the category, marking it with the sign of the juvenile and irrational; the second, when Herder recuperated it, marking it as primordial and authentic’ (Lincoln, 1999, p. 209).

The dynamic meaning of terms and the complexity of political discourse, which includes both reason (logos) and rhetoric, are also represented in Fontana’s (2000) treatment of these matters in terms of hegemony. There is a certain tension in his
and Gramsci’s (Fontana, 2000, p. 326; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 60, 256, 259) conception that hegemony involves the generation of ‘permanent consent’, on the one hand, and the persistence of politics, which involves ongoing conflict between antagonistic groups, on the other. Both the domination of one group within a power relationship and reiterated practices or rituals (Lukes, 1998, p. 691) account for permanency and legitimacy; whereas, political debate has to be ongoing, and its terms of discourse and articulated justifications tend to evolve. Thus, talk affords not just a vehicle for generating consent; it also offers the means for struggling against systems of domination, both within the leading groups and by opposition groups.

It may not be unreasonable to regard the prominent place of speech in the politics of the Greeks as ideological discourse in which self-understanding, identification with virtue, claims of strategic prowess and so forth figured prominently. Speeches like those of Pericles to the Athenians were exercises in justification of societal power arrangements and mobilization of the citizenry on behalf of state objectives. Speeches like those of the Athenians to the Melians were articulations of belief in an attempt to exercise power without the use of violence, even though the invocation of threats of force formed a feature of the speech.

More systematically, the Romans employed ideology to insure the obedience of other peoples within its empire. In his rich analysis of this aspect of the Roman empire, Ando (2000, pp. 6–7) wrote, ‘The Romans brought to the governance of their empire a set of theories developed in their own political life ... . As Romans had sought to found the order of Roman society on *consensus*, a unanimous intersubjective agreement about social, religious and political norms, so under the empire the Roman government encouraged its subjects to play an active role in empowering their rulers. Above all, they sought expression of *consensus*, realized through religious and political rituals whose content could be preserved in documentary form’. Quoting Foucault (1980, p. 95), Ando (2000, p. 28) wrote that ideology was presented to appear not only ‘as the legitimate rights of sovereignty ... [but also] as the legal obligation to obey.’

Furthermore, the Romans, as well as their imperial subjects, believed in a divine sanction for the conquest that ‘inevitably endowed the ideal of an eternal empire with a certain currency. The acceptance of this ideal had the practical outcome of debasing the ideals of rebellion, freedom and self-determination’ (Ando, 2000, p. 66). Drawing on Habermas’s (1984; 1987) theory of communicative action, Ando (2000, p. 77) noted that Rome consistently insured that information was disseminated throughout the empire, and it also required provincials to respond to the information, thus ensuring compliance with the consensus. In this case, ideology, institutions, practices and rituals all served to legitimate the Roman rule. At the same time, as is characteristic of an empire as opposed to a hegemonic alliance, political discourse was confined to the ruling group. Moreover, the substitution of empire for hegemony also meant that no autonomy existed in the system. Thus, again it is clear that ideology applies not only to hegemonic political systems but also to empires.

Varied applications and practices in different political systems demonstrate the ubiquity of ideology, but they do not explain its origins. Like hegemony, ideology
occurs in a context of politics, which assumes conflict among groups. Hegemony stems from such human group characteristics as fear of domination, drive for autonomy and aspiration to dominate others. Similarly, ideology emanates from a quest to understand one’s own situation or analysis based on reason, and from the need for a tool to convince others to join a political project and to provide guidance to the convinced coalition in its political relations with other groups or policy statements based on rhetoric. Thus, in his exposition of Gramsci’s thinking, Wolf (1999, p. 44) commented on the condition in western states which allowed for ‘opposition parties to resist [hegemony] by developing counterhegemonic forms of their own. The balance between hegemony and counterhegemony would always be in flux. Thus, hegemony was envisaged not as a fixed state of affairs but as a continuous process of contestation’. In Wolf’s analysis of three cases – the Kwak’iutl of Vancouver Island, the Aztecs of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Central Mexico and the Germans in the Third Reich – the origins of transfer from one hegemony to another lie in crisis. Crisis gives rise to formulations that draw on old ideas and bring in new ones to combine in an ideology that mobilizes groups for action. Wolf (1999, p. 275) explained, ‘Culture is constructed in such encounters, but these are staged, prosecuted and resolved through the exercise of power’. Furthermore, he concludes all three of his cases included imaginary worlds in their ideologies, in which ‘a great part of the work of ideology [was] to confound origins and logical implications; to locate prototypical happenings at the beginning of the world and then make them into fundamental premises to which all thought and discourse should be referred. Sacralization, in turn, imparts to their spokesmen a special aura of authority ...’ (Wolf, 1999, p. 285). In one of his great insights, Wolf (1999, pp. 283–4) pointed out that, while performing functions of justifying power and providing it ideals and virtues, the imaginary worlds of ideology postulate cosmologies; ‘cosmologies, in turn, articulate with ideologies that assign to the wielders of power the role of mediators or executors on behalf of larger cosmic forces and grant them “natural” rights to dominate society as delegates of the cosmic order’. From this it followed for Wolf (1999, pp. 285–6) that the opposition of universal ideas based on reason and specific cultures as particular was a false one. He drew on Solomon (1979) for the broad notion of civilization that he insisted actually came from the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie that advocated its own agenda under formulations such as ‘humanity’ and ‘human rights’, basing the articulation of its interests in a language of ‘self-evident truths’, proclaimed in a spirit of ‘moral righteousness’.

At the same time, within hegemonic systems in which a politics of contention persists, both reason and rhetoric remain components of political discourse as tools for both dominant and resisting groups, as Fontana, Nederman and Remer (2004) pointed out. What Wolf’s analysis allows us to do, though, is to distinguish between reason and rhetoric on the basis that ideological rhetoric has a tendency to conflate cosmological themes and present policy considerations and to elevate origins above coherent logical implications of current actions. At the same time, the Platonic ideal of a philosophically remote elite that dominates society erases politics from society, and there is little room for counterhegemony. If one constructs a system of domination that allows for counterhegemony, however, rhetoric has to remain a component that allows leaders and allies to interact by means of speech
Autonomy

Autonomy of individuals and societies forms a single social fact. The very notion of an autonomous individual is a societal construction. In Castoriadis's (1991, pp. 61–2) words, 'The individual/society opposition, when its terms are taken rigorously, is a total fallacy. The opposition, the irreducible and unbreakable polarity, is that between psyche and society. ... the psyche becomes individual, solely to the extent that it undergoes a process of socialization ... the socialization of individuals – itself a socially instituted process, and in each case a different one – opens up these individuals, giving them access to a world of social imaginary significations whose instauration as well as incredible coherence ... goes unimaginably beyond everything that “one or many individuals” could ever produce'. Furthermore, autonomy is a project in which philosophy and democracy 'are expressions and central embodiments' (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 21). The Greeks created the project when they began ‘putting things into question, criticizing them, requiring an accounting for something and giving a reason for it ... [This posture] implies that there is no extrahuman authority responsible ... for what occurs in history ...’ (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 4). As such, the citizens acting together in a political society take responsibility for their own laws and their own actions. The creation of a polity entails ‘a movement of explicit self-institution. The cardinal meaning of explicit self-institution is autonomy: we posit our own laws’ (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 105). In order to do this, we must have a public space in which the citizens can come together to talk about politics before deliberating and enacting laws (Arendt, 1958; 1970; Goehler, 2000). Furthermore, such a conceptualization includes in modern politics the possibility and the existence of associations and groups through which citizens act in concert. Present-day discourse designates this as civil society. Under whatever name, the concept involves the possibility of free speech, debate and questioning. At the same time, it presupposes ‘the right for all to speak their minds ... and the commitment for all to really speak their minds concerning public affairs’ (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 113). Moreover, such a notion of autonomy involves a civic education in the sense that the identity of the citizens and the polity are fused, that the polity has responsibility for forming citizens and that citizens have the responsibility for the fate of the polity (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 113). Part of the formation of citizens stems from the existence of philosophy, and it is only in such a society that philosophy can exist. As put by Castoriadis (1991, p. 137), ‘... a philosopher who “retires from society”, or any other philosopher, is possible only in a society in which freedom and autonomy are already open options. A Babylonian Socrates is inconceivable’.

Such a polity represents a specific kind of hegemony, in which the ideas of freedom, conduct of public affairs by speech rather than violence and self-governance prevail: an autonomous society. Despite the fact that such a society has unlimited power to socialize the individual, the individual has a core that is never completely dominated; through education, the individual can be free within a free society (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 160). Thus, such a hegemonic system foments autonomy,
which ‘does not consist in acting according to a law discovered in an immutable
Reason and given once and for all. It is the unlimited self-questioning about
the law and its foundations ... . Autonomy is the reflective activity of a reason
creating itself in an endless movement, both as individual and social reason’

In a similar fashion, Clarke (1999, p. 7) stated, ‘Autonomy is not ... a merely indi-
vidual property. It is a social property that is expressed individually’. He argued
that ‘... autonomy included both inner and outer components, a self of a certain
kind and a world of a certain kind. The self must be capable of initiating action
and the world must be capable of yielding to certain kinds of actions’ (Clarke, 1999,
p. 3).

He wrote,

Internally, at least, freedom and autonomy consists in not being a pris-
oner of a particular ideology, a particular school of thought, a particular
conceptual framework, or particular paradigm. ... On the contrary,
autonomy requires an openness ... fluidity and lucidity ... . [It] requires
bringing ... reflective judgment to bear not only on the standpoint of
others, but ... on one’s own perspective (Clarke, 1999, p. 260).

Furthermore, Clarke (1999, p. 276) argued that autonomy required that actual
choices remain available. Such choices, of course, have to be supplied by society.

In this conceptualization, we find the source of autonomy to be a specific hegemonic
system of domination that itself embodies the notion of autonomy for both the
polity and its citizenry. This comprises one type of autonomy that can be designated
as autonomy within hegemony. Such a hegemonic system excludes a narrow range
of choices and activities, primarily those that would eliminate autonomy, or the
ability to choose. At the same time, it contains within it potential for considerable
choice and change. For example, within the United States, the system has encom-
passed such significant changes as a transformation from a society based on racial
domination justified by theories of racial superiority to a racially egalitarian society
that celebrates multiculturalism and a shift from economic principles based on the
thinking of Keynes to those inspired by Hayek. In circumstances of crisis, some ideas
within such a hegemonic system rise in prominence. For example, the attacks
on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia in 2001 ‘re-
energized America’s sense of mission’, ‘changed [the] emphasis of mission ... from
promoting good to crushing evil’, shifted the emphasis ‘to changing [the world] by
force’, reinvigorated ‘the American capacity for ruthless action’ and increased ‘the
tendency for the United States ... to act unilaterally’ (Harries, 2002). Through all of
these substantial modifications, the ideology and the hegemonic system of the
United States have remained intact, demonstrating such characteristics of autonomy
as acting responsibly, flexibly and in a self-determining, self-governing fashion.
Simultaneously, the changes illustrate the complexity of the hegemonic system that
contains within it autonomous groups promoting quite distinct ideas that are con-
tained within the encompassing ideology.

There is a second type of autonomy that emanates from the Gramscian concept of
counterhegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Wolf, 1999, p. 44). For Gramsci (Bobbio, 1988,
p. 88), within the politics of the state there existed the possibility within civil society for the formulation of an alternative conception of political order that is opposed to the prevailing hegemonic system. On the basis of such an ideology, leading groups could form alliances in order to mobilize for replacing the extant political order. Given the substantial space for autonomy within hegemony, the question posed is: What are the sources and conditions for such counterhegemonic movements to succeed? Upon what foundations can an opposed ideology be built?

In his analysis of the British Raj, Guha (1997, p. 11) argued that ‘an uncompromising critique’ of a ruling culture must come from ‘another and historically antagonistic discourse’. Although the British wrote the history of their Indian empire from the perspective of their domination and co-opted Indians into understanding their lives in the same terms, the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to find an opposed ideology ‘has frustrated the bourgeoisie in its effort so far at winning a hegemonic role for itself even after half a century since the birth of a sovereign Indian nation state’ (Guha, 1997, p. xiii). He attributed the failure partly to Indian historians who had not reached back to their pre-colonial past for sources of a counterhegemonic ideology and partly to the failure of the Congress Party to act as a hegemon, or leader of an alliance, but instead to seek an exclusive dominance of Indian politics (Guha, 1997, pp. 130–47).

Successful counterhegemonic movements stem from state crises. Goldstone (1991) analyzed the extensive state breakdowns that occurred in Europe and China in the seventeenth century. He remarked on ‘the originating patterns of state breakdown’ that included fiscal crises, elite protection of their private interests to the neglect of public services and popular uprisings (Goldstone, 1991, pp. 3, 418). It is only in the period after the breakdown of the state, however, ‘during the ensuing power struggles and state reconstruction that ideology and culture take leading roles’ (Goldstone, 1991, p. 416).

Wolf (1999) described a very similar phenomenon in his cases, which include the German situation between the first and second world wars, but he also placed the ideological struggles within a political structure and identified the sources of the ideas. Arguing that crisis gives rise to ideology that draws on old ideas and brings in new ones that mobilize groups for action, Wolf (1999, p. 275) wrote, ‘Cultures are constructed in such encounters, but these are staged, prosecuted and resolved through the exercise of power’. He makes clear that ideologies are used by elites to give society direction, not organize ordinary people’s minds, even though the ‘ideologies do ... exhibit an ability to connect questions of power with the existential concerns of everyday life’ (Wolf, 1999, p. 290).

If the contemporary international system can be conceived as one dominated by a hegemonic coalition of states that is based on a foundation of American military power and an ideology of liberal market economics and democratic politics, an example of an opposed universe of antagonistic ideology, part of a counterhegemonic movement, exists in the Islamic Arab region. A quest for independence from the West based upon a spiritual purification originated with the Moslem Brotherhood founded in Egypt in 1928 (Heywood, 1998, p. 305), and this manifestation of counterhegemony has been renewed in recent years. Other discourses of opposition to the so-called hegemony of the West have been launched in the Middle
East since the end of World War I, but none has been able to forge an alliance strong enough to provide a substantial power base for an independent hegemonic system. Nonetheless, the politics of counterhegemony proceeds.

In addition to the two types of autonomy discussed so far – autonomy within hegemony and counterhegemony – there is a third type of autonomy, which is based primarily upon power but which makes use of ideology as well, an opposed hegemony. During the cold-war period, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics represented an opposed hegemony, a state that controlled a major power base and an empire and that invoked an ideology both for guiding state actions and for making universal claims. The USSR existed outside the realm dominated by the United States, its system of hegemonic domination not encompassed within that of the liberal system. In the end, it was a crisis of the state and the loss of conviction by the elites in their own ideology that led to state breakdown and the disintegration of the Soviet empire.

Since the end of the cold war, it is possible to conceptualize the world as a whole as a hegemonic system organized by an ideology of neoliberal capitalism and democratic politics. In mid-2005 there existed no substantial opposed hegemonic system, and the forces of counterhegemony seemed unlikely soon to accumulate sufficient power to gain supremacy. Although some writers, Cox (1981) and Hardt and Negri (2000) included, envisaged the rise of non-state groups in a global civil society that might overturn the existing hegemonic system, their ideas remained exceptionally speculative. In addition, the movements identified did not appear to be ready to assume an institutionalized or otherwise powerful form and, therefore, seemed improbable. Thus, the remaining possibilities for an end to the existing hegemonic system lie in a crisis. Like state breakdowns, such an international system collapse might occur as a result of a fiscal crisis, the failure of state leaders to attend to the public interest, serving their private interests instead, and turmoil from groups not in power. A second source of collapse was envisaged by Ikenberry (2002, p. 309) who listed among his ‘sources of breakdown and decline’ an atomic explosion in Europe or the United States by a terrorist group that would lead to the closing of borders and the ending of the system of trade and financial flows that has grown in the post-World War II period.

Conclusion

In this article, I have distinguished domination by force alone from hegemonic domination, which in most literature is held to be characterized by an ideology that accompanies power. Upon examination, ideology does not appear to be uniquely associated with hegemonic systems, for tyrannies and other sorts of repressive states as well as empires employ ideology as well. The very notion of a hegemonic system of domination, in which ideology is regarded as a means of convincing allies and associates, implies the notion of autonomy. For free allies that need to be convinced by debate and political talk have choice. They are free to choose to support a hegemonic alliance, but they are free to reject it as well. In no case are ideology and power completely separate because every state or system of political domination includes both. However, only hegemonic systems include autonomy in which the basis of rule exists in the citizenry and in which no
permanent consent or outside authority prevents consideration of all political questions.

Thus, the distinctive feature of hegemony is not ideology; instead, it is autonomy. Systems of domination that do not include autonomy are based on power alone, even though elites may use ideology to justify their rule. Without autonomy, there is no hegemony. Hegemony necessarily implies autonomy.

In addition, the analysis identified three types of autonomy: autonomy within hegemony, counterhegemony and opposed hegemony. Beyond identification, it may be pointed out that these differentiated types of autonomy as related to hegemony occur in different circumstances. The first two types can be used to analyze both the organized internal politics of states and international politics; the third type is applicable particularly to international politics and civil-war situations.

As a complex idea with several types of manifestation that can more usefully be understood in connection with autonomy and power than as a stand-alone concept, hegemony may be employed not just in descriptive analysis but also in analytical probing. Work remains to be done in delving into how counterhegemonic movements arise and the ways in which one hegemony replaces another. Like other political systems, hegemonic ones also decay; the sources and circumstances of decay provide another puzzle for interested scholars to research.

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