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From

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A PRIMER OF Libeterian
Education

(Free Life, New York, 1975)

THE GROWTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS: MARX TO FREIRE

KARL MARX REFERRED to Max Stirner as a man in revolt against the "rule of thoughts," who believed that if you taught people "to knock them out of their heads . . . existing reality . . . would collapse."¹ This, Marx said, was very much like believing that drowning resulted from people being possessed with the idea of gravity; if you knocked the idea out of their heads by showing it to be a superstition or a religious idea, it "would be proof against any danger from water." It was not enough to talk about the "spooks" controlling human consciousness without talking about the social reality which produced those spooks. This link between social reality and consciousness had important implications for pedagogical methods, becoming a key element in the educational proposals of twentieth-century humanist psychologists like Carl Rogers and in the pedagogical techniques of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.



capable of transforming the world. To be human is to be an actor who makes choices and seeks to guide one's own destiny. To be free, to be an actor, means knowing who one is and how one has been shaped by the surrounding social world. It is one's social world and environment that determine the nature of one's consciousness and ideology. Without a knowledge and awareness of that determination, humanization is impossible.

The opposite of a humanized world, in Freire's terms, a dehumanized world, is one without self-awareness, without a consciousness of the historical forces determining existence. Without this consciousness people are unable to become actors in the stream of history and are simply *acted upon* by history. This condition of oppression is what Freire calls the *culture of silence*. The culture of silence can be a product either of simple ignorance or of education itself. By being kept in a state of simple ignorance, the peasant in Brazil can be locked in this culture of silence, never realizing the forces that caused his or her poverty. On the other hand, an educational program which only assimilates the peasant into the very social system which caused impoverishment in the first place, is not a liberatory force. Freire would have agreed with Sturmer that education can produce wheels in the head that stand in the way of consciousness of self.

This concept of humanization implies, as Marx stated, that "consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process." In a pedagogical sense this means that to expand consciousness is to make one aware of one's life processes. From Marx's standpoint, however, life was not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life, and it was this criticism that he leveled at Stimer. The interaction of an individual with the world determined his or her subjective view of the world and of self. In other words, an individual learned a concept of self, whom he or she was, by the nature of his or her relationships to

Paulo Freire, in conducting literacy programs for adults in Brazil in the mid-twentieth century, developed a perspective which combined educational methods with this Marxian concept of consciousness. The separation of thought and action is overcome by linking learning to will and social action. Learning becomes an instrument for individual liberation. Freire first set forth his educational method in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Recife in Brazil in 1959. While working as Professor of History and Philosophy of Education at the same university, his teaching methods were implemented throughout the northeastern part of Brazil. After the military coup of 1964, Freire was jailed by the government for his educational activities. He was "invited" to leave the country and spent the next five years working in Chile, then became a consultant at Harvard University. Freire's lectures at Ivan Illich's Center for Intercultural Documentation in Mexico in 1970 and 1971 attracted students from throughout South America. In Mexico and other Latin American countries his techniques have been implemented in both rural and urban settings. Freire must be considered one of the most important educational philosophers of the twentieth century.

At the heart of Freire's educational method is a concept of humanity which owes its origin to Marx's concern with the development of individual consciousness and alienation in modern society. His concept of human potential in many ways fulfills the meaning of consciousness as defined by Marx and gives expression to Stimer's concept of ownership of self. One must understand Freire's concept of humanity in order to grasp his educational method. Freire's whole technique stands in danger of being trivialized unless this concept is emphasized.

The goal of social life, Freire argues, is the humanization of the world. By this he means a process by which each person becomes conscious of the social forces working upon him or her, reflects upon those forces, and becomes

words that help them understand their world, their awareness of self constantly expands. For Freire, acquiring literacy through thematic representations becomes a means of *objectifying* the individual's world. It gives the individual the necessary tools for thinking about the world. A culture of silence is one in which people are unable to distance themselves from their life activity, making it impossible for them to rise to the level of reflection. The dialogue around thematic representations provides a means toward reflection and a basis for both literacy and self-consciousness.

Within this framework learning becomes a source of liberation and a tool for social change. People are dehumanized because they lack a full awareness of their life activity. This is why people in a culture of silence do nothing to change their world. Freire agrees with Marx that "the animal is one with its life activity. It does not distinguish the activity from itself. It is its activity."⁵ In this sense, those in a culture of silence remain at a level of mere animal activity; in fact, the source of economic and political oppression is precisely the reduction of human beings to this state. Freire wants to restore humanity to the oppressed by giving them a conscious life. As Marx wrote, "But man makes his life itself an object of his will and consciousness. He has a conscious life activity. . . . Conscious life activity distinguishes man from the life activity of animals."⁶

For Marx, Freire, and the twentieth-century existentialist psychologists, it is in the realm of consciousness that the contradiction between freedom and determinism is overcome. While consciousness and life activity are determined by material conditions, a person who has no consciousness of self, who has nothing but life activity, is completely propelled by social forces. But the person who is *aware* of these forces and *conscious* of their nature is able to break with the trajectory of history and participate in the radical change of self and society. Rollo May,

society. Human interaction with the world also produces an ideology and an understanding of the world. As Marx wrote, "We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process."⁷

For Freire, to know the objective world is to begin to know oneself. If learning is to be meaningful, it must be tied to the life process of the individual. Freire's method of teaching illiterates began with a concrete study of the everyday lives of the people. For example, in a small village a team of educators would work in cooperation with the villagers to develop thematic representations of the life processes of the residents. These would then be presented to the villagers in the form of pictures, tapes, or any appropriate media. The thematic representation would contain certain problems and contradictions in the culture which could serve as the basis for discussion. In Freire's words,

Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.⁸

One example presented a scene of a drunken man walking on a street and three men standing on a corner talking. This scene was shown to a group of tenement dwellers in Santiago to raise questions about the causal relationships within their particular social organization and culture. The discussions resulting from such thematic representations would be the source for the words that would form the basis of the literacy campaign.

Language is tied directly to the life processes of the learner and thus becomes a source of self-understanding. As individuals progress in reading and writing by using

This praxis would end the separation of thought and action that Marx had argued was contributing to human fragmentation and alienation. The origins of this separation, according to Marx's interpretation, lay in the historical development of the separation of classes and the division of labor. The separation of manual and mental labor in the development of civilization permitted the separation of consciousness from life activity. Marx wrote in *The German Ideology* that with the division between mental and manual labor

consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it is really conceiving something without conceiving something *real*; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc."

Marx also saw this division between theory and practice as resulting from the organization of modern industry. In *Capital* he argued that the worker became a mere appendage of the machine, trapped in a life of endless drudgery and routine. Intellectual and reflective powers were not brought into use in manual labor. Marx wrote,

The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery.

People in the modern factory organization were forced into specialized and limited roles with the intellectual activity a function of the managers and owners. Individual skill and worth, Marx argued, "vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces,

writing about existential psychology in the mid-twentieth century, argues that while psychology must recognize deterministic factors and human finiteness,

In the revealing and exploring of these deterministic forces in the patient's life, the patient is orienting himself in some particular way to the data and thus is engaged in some choice, no matter how seemingly insignificant: is experiencing some freedom, no matter how subtle."

And it is precisely toward this relationship to the individual's world that Freire's educational method is meant to lead.

In this method the tying of language and learning to the life processes is meant to overcome the separation of thought and action. The dialogue based on thematic representations of everyday life is meant to grow into a greater consciousness of the surrounding social reality. Theory and activity are to be brought together in social action. According to Freire, "... a revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is, with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed." A drawing of tenement living conditions might be presented to the poor of an area and from this would grow a reflective process questioning the conditions and their social causes. No theory as to *why* the conditions existed would be given to the poor; rather, theory would be a product of the reflection and action of the people themselves.

The leaders cannot treat the oppressed as mere activists to be denied the opportunity of reflection and allowed merely the illusion of acting. ... It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation."

education assumes poverty exists because the poor do not know how to function properly within society. The goal of education, then, is to change the behavior of the poor so that it conforms to the needs of a society which created poverty in the first place. In the very process of educating the poor, all blame is placed upon them. They are condemned, essentially by being told they have failed.

In this manner the consciousness of the oppressed is changed without changing the oppressive conditions of society. Education as banking is not liberating but contributes to the docility and alienation of the oppressed. Marx's concept of alienation illuminates the full meaning of Freire's criticism of the banking method. For Marx, work should function to objectify the self and hence provide the individual with a source of *self-awareness*. Work or activity that becomes foreign to or alienated from the individual—as it does in the case of the banking method of education—does not fulfill this function. In answer to the question of what constitutes the alienation of labor, Marx wrote: "First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself. . . ." In the same manner the learning material of the banking method stands in opposition to the learner. Instead of affirming the learner's life and providing tools for greater understanding, it denies that life and obscures self-awareness.

Within this framework Marx's concept of human alienation is very similar to Freire's concept of the human being as the object of teaching. For Marx alienation meant that work or life activity is not an object for individual fulfillment; rather, the individual becomes a mere object used for production. "The alienation of the worker in his product," he wrote, "means not only that his labor becomes an object, assumes an external existence, but that it exists independently, outside himself, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power."

and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism. . . ."

Separation of thought and action means that theory becomes a product of a class which is separated from life activity. It means that individuals experience a fragmentation of their powers, becoming appendages of the machine rather than giving it control or direction. John Dewey, for instance, wrote in *Education and Democracy* that the separation of liberal education from industrial and professional education was a result "of a division of classes into those who had to labor for a living and those who were relieved from this necessity." Workers, he argued, had no insight into the social aims of their work and, consequently, the "results actually achieved are not the ends of their actions, but only of their employers."

FREIRE ARGUES THAT traditional education was premised on what he calls the "banking" method of education—the idea that a student is an *object* into which knowledge is placed, not a *subject* in the learning process. This banking method of education, Freire argues, shares many of the properties of an oppressive society: "the teacher teaches and the students are taught"; "the teacher thinks and the students are thought about"; "the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher"; and "the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects." In adult literacy programs the banking theory manifests itself in the use of reading material which has little relationship to the life activity of the learner. Rather, such programs attempt to work upon and change the learner.

The fact that the banking theory turns the learner into an object reflects the assumption that the fundamental problem is not with society but with the individual. In other words, in the case of poverty a banking system of

... when the dominated classes reproduce the dominators' style of life, it is because the dominators live "within" the dominated. The dominated can eject the dominators only by getting distance from them and objectifying them. Only then can they recognize them as their antitheses.¹⁶

For example, this was precisely the situation confronted by black people in the United States in their relationship to white society. By internalizing the style of life of the white population they were internalizing the very culture which had been responsible for slavery and racial segregation. For instance, black people discovered that they had adopted the same standards of beauty—fair skin and Caucasian facial features—as white members of the society. The slogan "Black is Beautiful" represented the beginning of the ejection of this false consciousness.

Freire's method is thus directed both at the expansion of consciousness and at the ejection of the false consciousness created by the structure of society. In this sense he combines the traditional Marxist concern about overcoming alienation with the traditional libertarian desire for freedom from imposed moral imperatives. This means that peasants in Latin America must be given the tools to lift themselves out of the culture of silence and gain conscious control over the social forces affecting their lives. People must be helped to see that part of the problem is their own acceptance of "success" as it has been defined for them by the dominant class. They must begin to treat their own lives as *authentic* and not to reject their own realities on the basis of the values of the dominant class.

Without the ejection of these values, social change would mean only that one oppressive faction takes the place of another—essentially a change in palace guard without any change in the palace. This would not meet the criteria of a humanistic revolution, which can only be accomplished through individual liberation of consciousness, through the participation of all people in social change.

Similarly, in the banking method of education the learner's self becomes an object of the educational process, worked upon to achieve goals external to itself. The goals and content of this kind of education are not a product of the learner, they are not subject to his or her control. The learner is viewed as an object, a means for achieving the teacher's end. The object of teaching is not to understand the self but to change the individual in accordance with alien goals. For instance, the banking method of education not only tells the poor *they* are the *problem*, but also establishes a model of what they should be which is alien to what they are.

The model presented to the oppressed of what they should be like is a model shaped by the oppressor. Such a model inherently tends to perpetuate the existing social structure. Thus both the content and moral imperatives of the banking method reflect the ideology of the ruling class. As Marx wrote, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."¹⁷

What the banking method of education achieves is the creation of a consciousness which is alien to the learner. The poor are given a model based on the life and actions of the rich. Such models were just what Stirner had criticized as moral imperatives which force people to act in contradiction to their own needs and liberation.

ONE OF THE GOALS of Freire's method is to bring those in a culture of silence to an understanding of self which would allow them to expel the internalized image of the dominant class.

These limitations become apparent when humanist psychologists talk about social change. For Carl Rogers the key to social change is a self-actualized person who creates a climate which allows for self-actualization of other people. Rogers calls this the "chain reaction" effect of client-centered therapy.

Here is a theoretical basis for sound interpersonal, intergroup, and *international relationships*. . . . This atmosphere of understanding and acceptance is the very climate most likely to create a therapeutic experience and consequent self-acceptance in the person who is exposed to it.

For Rogers it is the "psychological 'chain reaction' which appears to have tremendous potentialities for the handling of problems of social relationships."¹⁹ This is a utopian vision which is to grow from the warm acceptance of all people. Compared to Freire's humanized individual engaged in changing self and the world, Rogers' self-actualized person appears incomplete.

The political and social implications of Freire's method become evident in his demonstration of the relationship between levels of individual consciousness and levels of development of political and social organization. Individual liberation through education is closely tied to stages of social liberation. This relationship clearly is not the same as Rogers' "chain reaction" of acceptance, but is rather a process of turning the individual's learning into self-liberation by working to create a liberated society.

Another important point about Freire's attempt to link levels of conscious development to political and social reality is that it makes his educational theory universal, establishing its relevance for highly industrialized societies as well as for those of the Third World.

In Freire's model the lowest level of consciousness is, of course, the culture of silence in the peasant societies of the Third World. In Latin America this takes the form of a

THE RADICALISM OF FREIRE'S PRAXIS, which ties together reflection and action, can be more fully appreciated if it is compared to the ideas of a humanist psychologist like Carl Rogers. Rogers' therapy, and what he calls student-centered teaching, is based on a concept of self-actualization and self-awareness very similar to Freire's ideas. The drive for self-actualization is what Freire calls the "humanism of man (*sic*)"; it is a desire to gain greater conscious control over one's environment. Rogers writes that self-actualization means movement "in the direction of greater independence or self-responsibility . . . in the direction of increasing self-government, self-regulation, and autonomy, and away from heteronymous control, or control by external forces."¹⁷ Self-actualization is achieved through what Rogers calls congruence of the personality. "We may say," he writes, "that freedom from inner tension, or psychological adjustment, exists when the concept of self is at least roughly congruent with all the experiences of the organism."¹⁸ In other words, psychological adjustment occurs when one's concept of self corresponds to the forces that have shaped that self. Congruence of personality means that one has an awareness of the social forces shaping personality and an ability to control and give direction to those forces.

But humanist psychologists like Rogers fail to relate personality to the structure of society and to go beyond self-actualization to the transformation of society. It is after all the organization of society which assumes a major share of the responsibility for non-congruence and lack of self-actualization. The failure to analyze social and political implications is what makes humanist psychology superficial. It is more of a technique for management and adjustment than for changing society. This is one reason why methods like those of Carl Rogers have become popular among school leaders in the United States.

consciousness. The situation would be analogous to a prison in which an attempt is made to satisfy discontent by allowing prisoners to exercise outdoors. The result for the prisoners would be a heightened awareness of their imprisonment. When a minor social reform is made, people may gain an understanding of critical social problems and may push for even greater changes.

In describing the transition of consciousness Freire is trying to describe the developing political conditions in both the Third World and industrialized countries. He argues that the contradictions at the stage of naive-transitiveness foster the growth of a populist leadership which attempts to exploit the awakening consciousness of the people for its own gain. At this stage, because the masses cannot speak for themselves, they depend on populist leaders. At the same time intellectuals and students start to become engaged in social projects. Art becomes directed toward problems of concrete social reality. The inherent contradiction at this stage results from populist leaders allowing the participation of youth groups and intellectuals in the political process in order to control them. This allows for the development of revolutionary leaders within the political process itself. Freire's description of this stage of transition of consciousness sounds very much like the situation in the United States in the 1960's and early 1970's. Populist political leaders attempted to manipulate popular opinion by seeking help from intellectuals and youth and by using protests of these groups to cement their own political ranks.

For Freire, the revolutionary leadership would be comprised of those who help the masses move from the levels of semi-intransitive or naive-transitive consciousness to the level of critical consciousness. He argues that if the masses are not made the subject of the revolutionary process rather than its object, the revolutionary project will move to the right. A truly liberating revolution is one in which the people assume the role of active subjects in

rural/urban split, with the rural areas dominated by and dependent on the ruling elites of the urban centers. As stated above, the dependent society accepts the values and life style of the dominator and cannot achieve self-awareness. "This results," Freire writes,

in the duality of the dependent society, its ambiguity, its being and not being itself, and the ambivalence characteristic of its long experience of dependency, both attracted by and rejecting the metropolitan society.²⁹

Individuals at this level of consciousness tend to ascribe the cause of their plight to self-blame or to supernatural sources. For example, peasants might feel that hunger is caused by their own incapacity or that it represents the anger of the gods. In Freire's educational process dialogue about problem situations might at first tend to resort to such explanations, but part of the goal of dialogue would be to aid in going beyond that level of consciousness. The culture of silence also exists in industrial countries. Minority groups in the United States, for example, have only recently been emerging from their own state of dependence, throwing off their self-concepts of natural incapacity and their internalization of the values and life style of the dominator.

Freire's next stage of consciousness and social development is very close to the level of development of most industrial countries. He calls this stage naive-transitiveness because it refers to the beginning of a popular consciousness, one which has not fully emerged from the culture of silence. At this stage pressure and criticism begin to be applied to the dominant groups in the society. The leaders of a society might respond to this by allowing superficial changes and granting certain political and economic privileges in order to maintain their control. But these changes would still result in a heightening of popular

rather than in response to their dialectical relationships with the world." In a mass society almost all consciousness of self is lost. Gone is the element of risk and planning on an individual level. "They do not have to think about even the smallest things; there is always some manual which says what to do in situation 'a' or 'b'." The mass society is a well-schooled society where people have given up independent thinking for mere learning based on expert advice. As in one of Freire's examples, "Rarely do men have to pause at a street corner to think which direction to follow. There's always an arrow which de-problematizes the situation." While street signs are not evil "they are among thousands of directional signals in a technological society which, introjected by men, hinder their capacity for critical thinking."

While Freire's educational work grew out of a concern for the problems of South American society it has universal relevance as a definition of humanism and as an educational method. Obviously the method is not limited to one age group but can be applied to all people in all societies. If one applies the model to a country like the United States, for example, it raises some very important issues. It has already been suggested that within this framework minority groups in the United States can be considered as being at the level of a culture of silence or at a level of intransitive consciousness. Furthermore, the majority of other Americans can be classified as being in a state of transitive consciousness or existing with the "irrational consciousness" of a mass society. The concept of mass society represents an extension of Freire's criticism of the banking method of education. The individual, an object within the mass society, is taught how to use his or her tools and conveniences properly. In such a society no situation becomes problematical or calls for individual praxis. People are dehumanized because of the lack of interrelationship between consciousness and practice.

It seems obvious what Freire's method means for a

the transforming and recreating of the world. Freire sums up the difference between cultural action of the left and of the right: "The former problematizes, the latter sloganizes." The right-wing revolutionary assumes that people have to be shaped to fit the "utopian" vision of the leaders. The left-wing revolutionary assumes that the people themselves must make the utopian vision.

For Freire the role of a critical consciousness cannot stop even with the birth of a revolutionary society. Critical consciousness plays a role in ejecting those cultural myths which remain. It is also "a force countering the bureaucracy, which threatens to deaden the revolutionary vision and dominate the people in the very name of their freedom." While Freire does not speak directly of the Russian revolution, it is probably the example he had in mind. The failure of the revolutionary cause and the swing to the right in the Soviet Union can be linked to the defeat of the power of the local soviets and the end of the mass participation of the people in the revolutionary endeavor.¹ The large-scale bureaucratic machinery that developed made the people into mere objects of economic and social planning, instead of active, critical subjects with control over social institutions. The new "socialist man and woman" have yet to be born in the Soviet Union.

Revolutionary change would not necessarily result from the contradictions arising under populist leadership, however. The other possible direction, Freire believes, along with Illich and others, would be the creation of a mass society. This would involve a change in consciousness from the transitive state to a pathological form of "irrational consciousness." Highly technological societies may be moving toward a future where specialization in work becomes so narrow that people are generally incapable of thinking. In a dehumanized mass society, people no longer participate in the transformation of society. Freire writes, "Men begin thinking and acting according to the prescriptions they receive daily from the communications media

FREIRE'S METHOD DEPENDS on dealing with real and important problems. The problems cannot be artificial classroom contrivances. This, of course, means that whether the method is trivialized or not depends on the group leader. Freire assumes that the contradictions of the culture of transitive consciousness will produce that revolutionary leadership. This optimism might not be shared by everyone.

There is also an assumption in Freire's method that people will *want* to become self-aware and that once this is accomplished, they will act in their own interests and in a *rational* manner. For what if people resist real freedom and self-awareness? The problem of individual freedom extends beyond just consciousness to include human character structure. For example, Wilhelm Reich argued that Marx would not have been able to explain the rise of fascism in Germany in the 1930's because he lacked the tools for understanding character structure, especially the particular character structure which sought the security of an authoritarian state. From this particular view the implementation of Freire's humanized world requires another element. It requires liberating the character structure of the individual so that self-awareness and a desire for self-determination become possible. It also implies that the establishment of a liberated world means changing child-rearing patterns and the family, so that people desire to be and can be free.

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country like the United States. It means that learning must result from praxis. Learning must be directly connected to social problems and used to solve those problems. It means a recognition of the teaching of reading as the most political act in the educational process. Language is the tool an individual uses to relate to his or her world. Taught in the manner of the banking method, it becomes a tool for the stifling of consciousness. Taught as part of a continued expansion of consciousness, it becomes an instrument for self-liberation. To be taught how to read in a situation which is completely abstracted from self-understanding is to be, in Illich's terms, "well-schooled." Black people in the United States certainly discovered this when they began to look closely at the white, small-town bias of public school text books.

One can go about implementing Freire's methods in various ways, depending on the skills and the imagination of the group leader. For instance, one might teach reading in a middle-class suburb by beginning with some thematic representation of a community problem—pollution, perhaps, or, on a more unsophisticated level for small children, one might take up such everyday themes as play, fights, or family problems. The leader and the children engage in a dialogue about the nature of the problem. From this initial dialogue words are taken that begin to form the basic text for reading. The children then work to solve the problem, reflect on their attempted solutions, add new words and stories to their readers and attempt to develop theories about the situation. In a poor urban area themes dealing with crime, poverty, family problems, and pollution could be used. In both examples the actual themes would not be chosen until after careful investigation. In this manner action, learning and consciousness would develop together.