

Canada

NOTES ON HUMANISATION  
AND ITS  
EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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No subject is exactly what it appears in the linguistic form in which it is expressed. There is always behind it something hidden which goes deeper, and this must be made explicit for it to be generally understood. In other words, to write about a subject means finding out as best one can how to get round the deceptive appearances which can lead to a distorted vision of it. This in turn means that we have to make a strong effort to separate it from these appearances in order to reveal it as a phenomenon existing in a concrete reality.

By this act, which is an act of finding out, we come to grips with the subject in all its wealth of interrelations with particular aspects, which perhaps we do not even suspect exist, however closely bound up they may be with the subject. The more we are capable of this "entering into" the subject, the more readily we can grasp it in all its complex dynamism.

To write about a subject, therefore, is not, as we understand it, a simple act of narrating. Taking it as a phenomenon existing in a concrete reality which has a mediating effect on men, the writer has to take it from a gnoseological point of view.

In their turn, in adopting this same attitude, the readers have themselves to make the same gnoseological effort originally made by the writer,\* which means that the reader must not simply play the part of the "patient" in this gnoseological "operation". Both in fact, attempt to avoid the Socratic error which consists in defining a concept as the knowledge of the object defined.

Thus, what we have to do is not really to define the concept of the subject, nor simply to describe or explain it by taking its implications as a given fact; we have rather to adopt a position of commitment towards it. This is the attitude of someone who does not really want to describe what happens exactly in the form in which it happens, because he wants to transform reality in such way that what actually happens somehow happens in a different way.

This is not to say that this position of commitment with regard to subjects means that we start with preconceived attitudes when we set out to know reality as it is - attitudes in other words which could distort those facts in which the subjects are bound up, and end up by "domesticating" them to our will.

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\* See Paulo FREIRE : The Political Literacy Process - An Introduction



In attempting to know scientifically the reality in which the subjects exist, we must not subject the facts to our truth, but, on the contrary, we must seek the truth of the facts. This does not mean, however, that, when we engage in the action of investigating reality scientifically, we should adopt a neutral position towards it or towards the results of our investigation. We must not confuse preoccupation with the truth which should characterise any really serious scientific effort, with the so-called neutrality of science which in actual fact does not exist.

This position of commitment before the reality which we seek to know, results from the fact that knowledge is a process which implies the action-reflection of man on the world. The very teleological character of the unity action-reflection, that is, praxis, through which man, in transforming the world transforms himself, prevents him from being neutral. So, man cannot disregard this position of commitment, which in no way affects adversely our critical spirit or our scientific spirit. What is not legitimate for us is to be indifferent to the trend which might be given to the results of our scientific researches by those who hold the power of decision and submit science to their interests, and who impose their aims on the masses.

The position of commitment towards the subjects can also be explained by the fact that every subject has an opposite, and involves the carrying-out of obligations which are as strongly differentiated among themselves as the subjects are among themselves. Thus, when we enter into the comprehension of a subject, in the clarifying of it we clarify its contrary. This imposes an option on us, which in turn demands from us a form of action compatible with the obligations inherent in the subject. However, in carrying-out these obligations, precisely when we have to be efficient, we are not able to practise the kind of action which implies a corresponding efficiency with regard to the contrary subject. The more we go on gaining knowledge of the socio-historical reality in which the subjects stand in dialectical relation to their opposites, the less is it possible for us to become neutral towards them.

For this reason, any declaration of neutrality implies a hidden option. We must emphasise that the subjects in their historical context comprise certain valuable orientations from the existential experience of human beings.

Our attitude cannot be other than this confronted with the subject which unites us - the humanisation of man and its educational implications.



In the moment in which we critically approach and recognise this process as a subject, we have not to take it as an abstract ideal, but as a historical challenge, in its relationship of opposition to the dehumanisation practice which is to be found in the objective reality in which we exist. Thus, dehumanisation and humanisation cannot fail to be part of the history of men, within the social structures which men erect and within which they live conditioned.

The former occurs as the coherent expression of alienation and domination; the second as the utopian\* project of the dominated and oppressed classes. The former clearly suggests, in man's action on his social reality, an idea of preserving the status quo, the latter that of radically transforming the world of oppression.

We think it is important to underline this obvious relationship between dehumanisation and humanisation, as well as the fact that both imply man's action on reality, whether to preserve or to modify it. This is in order to avoid idealist illusions, one of which is to imagine that men can be humanised without the necessary transformation of the world in which they are oppressed and prevented from being men. This illusion accords with the interests of all those who enjoy favourable conditions of life, and reveals clearly the ideology behind which it attempts to conceal itself. This is the ideology of comfort, of conformity, of "recuperation", which is incarnate in "assistencial" forms of action, in which those who are prevented from being men are invited to await patiently better days, which may be long in coming, but which will certainly come.....

There can no more be humanisation in oppression than there can be dehumanisation in true liberation. Moreover, liberation cannot exist within men's consciousness, isolated from the world; it exists in the praxis of men in history which requires a critical awareness of the relation it implies between consciousness and the world.

Here we have one of the fundamental points of the educational implications of the humanisation process, which brings us to the awareness of another impossibility, one we have underlined in a number of our writings - the impossibility of a neutral education.

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\* Paulo FREIRE : Cultural Action for Freedom, Harvard Educational Review and the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, Cambridge, Mass. U.S.A. 1970



Just as the struggle for humanisation presupposes dehumanisation, whether as a concrete fact or as a threat, so both involve antagonistic educational praxis. Being subjects which are opposed to each other in any case, humanisation and dehumanisation necessarily have contrary educational obligations as well. The result of this is that the educator who chooses a humanist option, that is, a liberating one, will not be capable of carrying out the obligation bound up in the theme of his option, unless he has been able through his own praxis accurately to perceive the dialectical relationships between consciousness and the world or between man and the world.

Basically, the main difference between education as an obligation to dominate and dehumanise and education as an obligation to humanise and liberate is that the former is merely an act of transferring knowledge, while the latter is an act of knowing. These basically contrary obligations, which equally require contrary procedures, both bear on the relationship between consciousness and the world; it could not be otherwise.

When education is considered as an obligation to dominate in the relationships between consciousness and the world, the consciousness appears as if it were, as if it should be, a mere recipient to be filled; for education as a humanistic obligation to liberate, the consciousness is "intentionality" towards the world.

In the former case, the active character of the consciousness, the element which captures existing knowledge, is denied.

Thus, when education is taken as an obligation to dominate, to negate the active character of the consciousness, it implies the utilisation of practices which seek to "domesticate" it, and thus succeed in making consciousness the empty recipient referred to above. This means that education or cultural action for domination can never be anything more than the act in which the educator, - "he who knows," - transfers existing knowledge to the educatee, - "he who does not know."

In the latter case, however, when the active character of the consciousness, which seeks and investigates, and which makes it possible for man to know in a critical way, is in evidence, its capacity for re-knowing or re-creating existing knowledge on the one hand, and of revealing and of knowing what is still not known on the other, is automatically in evidence too. If this were not so, that is to say, if the consciousness which is able to re-know existing knowledge were not capable of seeking new knowledge, it would be unable to explain the very knowledge which exists here and now. That is to say that all new knowledge is born from previous knowledge which becomes old.



Thus education, or cultural action for liberation, instead of being the alienating transferring of knowledge, is the genuine act of knowing in which the educatees (who are also educators) - as conscious bodies in the world - go forward with the educators (who are also educatees) in the search for new knowledge; this is what comes out of the act of re-knowing existing knowledge. It would not be superfluous to underline that for education as the practice of liberation to be able to attempt to achieve the re-knowing of existing knowledge of what the obtaining of new knowledge reveals, it can never make its manner of "dealing with" man's consciousness coincide with the manner in which dominating education "deals with" it. Hence the necessity we referred to earlier of the educator who chooses the humanist option having a "correct" awareness of the relations between consciousness and the world or between man and the world.

This is why the practice of education for liberation takes on itself to propose to men a sort of "archaeology" of the consciousness. By making this effort they can in a sense again take the natural path from which the consciousness emerges able to perceive itself. In the process of "hominisation" in which reflection begins can be seen "the individual, instantaneous leap of instinct to Thought."\* From this furthest-back moment, the reflective consciousness characterises man as an animal not just capable of knowing but also capable of knowing that he knows. Thus, when it emerges, the consciousness emerges as "intentionality" and not as a recipient to be filled.

The critical perception of this fact destroys on the one hand the simplist dualism which establishes an imaginary dichotomy between consciousness and the world; on the other, it corrects the error into which the ingenuous consciousness falls when it is ideologised by the structures of domination, the error of considering itself to be the empty recipient which is to be filled with contents. It is for this reason that the more men are "anaesthetised" in their power of reflection - this power is acquired in the process of their evolution, and serves basically to distinguish them from animals\*\* - the more they find themselves hindered from really liberating themselves.\*\*\*

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\* Teilhard de CHARDIN : El Fenómeno humano, Taurus, Madrid, 1963  
p.218

\*\* Teilhard de CHARDIN : op.cit.

\*\*\* We do not mean in saying this that the mere use of the capacity for reflection suffices to liberate. It is obvious that liberation requires a transforming action on the objective reality in which men are oppressed, and even dehumanised. As there is no true reflection without action, and vice versa, they together constitute in the last analysis and without any possibility of dichotomy, the real praxis of men on the world, without which liberation is impossible.



3.

It thus seems easy to understand, from the point of view of a dehumanising ideology, why it is indispensable to avoid at all costs any act by which man can be aware of himself as a reflecting, acting being who also transforms the world. Indeed, it is in the interests of this ideology to put into operation a dominating conception of the consciousness as an empty space which must be filled.

In their objectives, and in seeking to carry them out, the power elites are confronted with an obstacle which they attempt to overcome, more efficiently each time, with the aid of the science and the techniques at their disposition. But as it is not possible for them to destroy or to make disappear men's capacity for thought, they mythify reality, and condition men to a false way of thinking about themselves and about the world.\*

The mythification of reality consists in making it appear what it is not. This mythification necessarily implies the falsification of the consciousness. What would be impossible would be the falsification of reality, the reality of the consciousness, without the falsification of the consciousness of reality. One cannot exist without the other.

Just as the process of liberation involves this "archaeology" of the consciousness through which, as we said before, man again takes the natural path from which the consciousness emerges able to perceive itself, in the process of domination mythification involves a different kind of "archaeology", the "archaeology" of "irrationality". However, this does not mean a return to a purely instinctive form of life, but rather a distortion of reason. The mythical element introduced into it does not precisely prevent man from thinking; it makes the exercising of his critical faculty difficult, at the same time in which it gives him the illusion that his thinking is right. Propaganda is established as the efficient instrument for creating this illusion. Through this, not only are the "excellences" of the social order praised, but it is made public that any attempt to investigate the social order is inherently "an act of subversion, harmful to the common good." Thus, mythification leads to the "sacralisation" of the social order, which must not be touched, nor even discussed. All who attempt to do so have to be punished in one form or another,\*\* and are exposed - also by means of propaganda - as "bad citizens in the service of international diabolism."

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\* For this see Paulo FREIRE : Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Herder and Herder, New York, 1970

\*\* Levels of punishment vary in proportion to the levels of opposition of those who refuse to adapt to the "bovinisation" imposed by the oppressing order.



The "sacralisation" of the domesticating social order is as necessary to its preservation as is critical "openness" to the society which is engaged in a permanent search to humanise men. Of course, all attempt at mythification tends towards "totalitarianism," that is to say tends towards involvement in human affairs in all their dimensions. No field is safe from falsification, since any exception may find itself turned into a threat to the "sacralisation" of the established order. This means that the school, whatever its level, finds itself playing a most important role, that of an instrument of social control. It is not uncommon to meet educators for whom "educating is adapting the educatee to their medium", and indeed the school does nothing other.

In general, the good pupil is neither restive, nor indocile; he does not show doubt, he does not wish to know the reason for facts, he does not go beyond set models, he does not denounce "mediocratising" bureaucracy, he does not refuse to be an object; the good pupil on the contrary is he who repeats, who refuses to think critically, who adapts to models, who "finds it nice to be a rhinoceros."\*

The teacher who "is divine" within the sacred and sacralising school is almost always untouchable, not just in his mythified authority but even - quite logically - physically. The pupil cannot even make the affectionate gesture of putting his hand on his shoulder. This intimacy between mortals would threaten the distance which should necessarily exist between him and the educatees.....The latter finally have nothing to do except receive the "contents" which the educator transfers to them, impregnated with the ideology which is necessary for the interests of the "sacralised" order.

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine ?  
What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine ?

I learned that Washington never told a lie,

I learned that soldiers seldom die,

I learned that everybody's free,

And that's what the teacher said to me.

That's what I learned in school today,

That's what I learned in school

I learned that policemen are my friends,

I learned that justice never ends,

I learned that murderers die for their crimes,

Even if we make a mistake sometimes.

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\* See IONESCO : Rhinocéros



I learned our government must be strong,  
It's always right and never wrong,  
Our leaders are the finest men,  
And we elect them again and again.

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine ?  
What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine ?  
I learned that war is not so bad,  
I learned about the great ones we have had,  
We've fought in Germany and France,  
And someday I may get my chance.  
That's what I learned in school today,  
That's what I learned in school.\*

This could be more or less the song that millions of children from different parts of the world might sing if we asked them what they learned in school today.

If our curiosity led us to ask our young people what they learned in the university today, their reply would not be dramatically less impressive than that of the little boy in Tom Paxton's song.

Among other things they might say :

Today we learned in the University that the objectivity of science implies the neutrality of the scientist; we learned today that Knowledge is pure, universal and unconditioned, and that the University is the Seat of this knowledge.

We learned today - although not verbally - that the world is divided between those who know and those who do not know - that is to say, those who work, and that the University is the Home of the former.

Today we learned that the University is the temple of chaste knowledge, and must live above terrestrial preoccupations like the liberation of men.

Today we learned that reality is a given fact, that it is what it is and that our scientific impartiality allows us to describe it as it is. In order to describe it as it is, we have no need to seek more important reasons explaining how it is. Today we learned in the University that if we manage to denounce it as it is at present in order to announce its new form of being, we are no longer scientists but ideologues.....

Today we learned that economic development is a purely technical problem; that underdeveloped peoples are inefficient - sometimes

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\* Tom Paxton, sung by Pete Seeger



because of race-mixtures, sometimes for climatic reasons, and sometimes just by nature.

Today we were informed that negroes learn less than white because they are intellectually inferior, even though they also show certain unquestionable abilities, such as being able to run, to use their hands, and to stand up to the most exacting physical work.

What is unquestionable is that the end-result of all this mythification, whether it comes through school or not, is to obstruct men's critical capacity in favour or preserving the status quo. The imposition of these myths, as of so many others, explains forms of action inconsistent with the options announced by many.

They speak of respect for the human person, and the "human person" is compressed into a banal phrase; then they fail to recognise the real men who are dominated and "thingified".

They say that they are committed to liberation and then act on myths which deny the humanisation of man.

They analyse the social mechanisms of repression, but at the same time, and using equally repressive methods, they hold down the students to whom they speak.

They call themselves revolutionaries, but at the same time do not believe in the people they claim to lead to liberation - as if this were not a glaring contradiction.

They desire the humanisation of men, and at the same time desire to preserve the social reality in which men are dehumanised.

At heart, they are afraid of liberty. With this fear, they cannot take the risk of establishing liberty through communion with those who live deprived of it.

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Seminar, EDUC-INTERNATIONAL : Tomorrow began Yesterday, Rome,  
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Translated from the Brazilian original by Louise Bigwood