

# **IN WHOSE NAME?**

## **SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE NOTION OF VOICE IN PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION**

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*Abstract*

This paper addresses the problem of voice in the contemporary reflection on politics and education. The first part examines the notions of contemporary thinkers who devoted their works to this question. The second part is an analysis of Freire's project of liberatory education. The aim of the second part is to disclose the hidden dimensions of the project and to examine the main weaknesses of such an approach.

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*Keywords:* Agamben, Rancière, voice, the oppressed, emancipation.

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### **V čigavem imenu? Nekaj refleksij o pojmu glasu v filozofiji in pedagogiki**

*Povzetek*

Pričujoči prispevek obravnava problem glasu znotraj sodobne refleksije glede politike in izobraževanja. Prvi del raziskuje pojmovanja sodobnih mislecev, ki so svoja dela posvetili temu vprašanju. Drugi del je analiza Freirejevega projekta osvoboditvenega izobraževanja. Namen drugega dela je prikaz skritih razsežnosti projekta in obravnava poglobitnih slabosti takšnega pristopa.

*Ključne besede:* Agamben, Rancière, glas, zatirani, emancipacija.

To speak with our voice, to manifest our unique perspective has become one of the major themes and goals of recent reflection. Questions concerning the repressed voices or the forgotten history re-emerging in the philosophical thought of the 20<sup>th</sup> century influence its general attitude and determine its aims. But what is this voice that should be heard? What truth does it bring? Are we able to hear it and to some point make it our own? All these questions haunt contemporary philosophy but are rarely posed in the field of education. More precisely, the problem of voice is recognized by theoreticians of education, however, only as a widely accepted, but at the same time very vague project of a more open education. In other words, it seems that the question of voice has been reduced to a practical problem concerning the means of the expression of different points of view. Although a redefinition of the learning process in terms of exchanging perspectives rather than imposing only one of them can hardly be questioned, the manner in which the problem of voice is being posed could be criticized as not being sufficiently grounded. In short, from a solely philosophical perspective, the contemporary discourse on education, especially the discourse emphasizing the emancipatory function of the learning process, lacks a deeper reflection on these questions.

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The first part of this paper will address philosophical perspectives regarding the problems of voice and the specific political meaning of the latter, as well as focus on a peculiar anthropology permeating Western thought. The last part of the paper will examine certain premises and consequences of the projects of education interested in a democratization of the process of learning. These latent premises animating progressive educational thought may be brought to the surface and consequently adjusted by taking into account the philosophical reflection regarding language, its origins, and the role of language in the process of becoming an individual.

### **The voice of politics and the politics of voice**

In his essay *The Ends of Man*, Derrida claims that philosophy and politics are bound by an essential relation (Derrida 1982, 111), and this paper will disclose the presence of such an inherent link not only between philosophy and politics, but also between education and philosophy, as well as between education and

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politics. In sum, the problem of voice is situated at the intersection of three realms: philosophy, politics, and education.

The question of voice and, more precisely, the question of the of silenced, unheard voices occupies a central place in the discourse of contemporary thought.<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of repressed voices reappears regularly in the philosophical as well as in the political debates. The task of recognizing these forgotten voices is connected with the ethical task of restoring these voices and doing justice to the repressed groups and cultures.<sup>2</sup>

142 One could argue that voice is by nature political and that, therefore, the discovery of a thus far omitted problem of voice and speech, in fact, means nothing more than giving a new form to an old idea. Man, according to the Aristotelian definition, is *zoon logon echon*, the creature belonging to the biological sphere, and differing from the realm of the living creatures by its ability to speak and to reason (Aristotle 1998, 4). At first glance, there is nothing problematic in this description which reflects the general rule governing every definition. And yet, recent debates show that this apparently uncontroversial definition turns to be one of the most challenging elements of political philosophy.

Recent discussions concerning the Aristotelian heritage focus on the pivotal element of the definition, that is, on the separation of animal and man, which, in fact, is the difference between meaningless sound and speech. For many contemporary thinkers the Aristotelian definition is much more than an inauguration of politics, it becomes a decision casting a shadow on the whole history of the West. According to this type of interpretation, which can be found in Agamben's and Rancière's works, Aristotle sets by defining man a

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1 It seems legitimate to speak about a philosophical imaginary, rather than a line of arguments, due to the fundamental nature of change in the philosophical dictionary, which impacts the mode in which we represent constitutive elements of our experience.

2 The writings of Gianni Vattimo provide an example of thought conflating the critique of Western rationality and politics with practical and ethical tasks of restoring the repressed cultures. It is worth mentioning that Vattimo uses his philosophical perspective to examine the present-day political situation. Hence, it is very clear that he does not separate his purely philosophical work from its empirical application. His radical hermeneutics is directly interested and involved in resolving practical problems.

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specific topology that determines the destiny of European culture. Thus, the task of understanding the nature and consequences of this gesture turns to be a vital question for philosophical reflection.

Regardless of all the discrepancies between them, the standpoints of Agamben and Rancière show profound similarities when it comes to the general approach to the history of the West and, in particular, to the fundamental dynamics between anthropology and politics. For both, Aristotelian philosophy initiates—or, perhaps, expresses in a most decisive manner<sup>3</sup>—the disposition of Western thought, which represents the nature of man only through a constant reference to the realm of the non-human.<sup>4</sup> This tension not only constitutes a specific ontology<sup>5</sup> upon which Western culture is based but, more importantly, influences the elementary mechanisms of politics.

In Agamben's and Rancière's view, the Aristotelian definition differentiating voice from speech and thus determining the nature of man, but also the realm of the non-human, becomes a threshold in the history of the West. The threshold initiating the emergence of politics. What is the nature of the division and what are the consequences of it? Apparently, from the outset on, anthropology could not exist without the necessary reference to the various forms of the inhuman, whether comprehended as animality or as divinity. Man, as we remember from the founding myths of philosophy, is a being situated between two worlds: the divine and the animal.

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Agamben's and Rancière's analysis leaves aside the traditional reference to the gods' world, instead they focus on the line separating man from animal.

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3 With regard to Agamben's and Rancière's stances it is impossible to decide whether Aristotle established the logic of Western politics and we are, thus, able to transgress it, or only expressed the nature of politics as such.

4 Agamben addresses this problem in his essay "Without Rank," where he examines the very surprising tradition of comprehending man as a creature bereft of nature. In other words, man differs from other things or from the rest of creatures by the fact of not having its proper nature (Agamben 2004, 29).

5 Speaking about ontology in this context might appear as lacking legitimization, however, Jean-Philippe Deranty points out in reference to Agamben's philosophy of language that: "The originality of Agamben's take on the question of enunciation, with profound implications in many other areas of his thinking, is that he interprets the shift from language to speech in a nonpsychological, indeed, an ontological, way" (Deranty 2008, 169)

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The animal, however, is more than just a neutral term of a taxonomy, it quickly transforms into a symbol referring to the inhuman as such. The inhuman that not only exists outside, but may also signify the inhuman inhabiting the man. With this second meaning we see emerging a possibility of the most horrific politics: the quest for the non-human forms of life within the human race.

Hence, the most important questions concern the relation between politics and this relational anthropology. Is politics as such coextensive with this type of anthropology or, perhaps, another type of politics is possible? There is also the question concerning the results of politics based on an anthropology defined by its relation to the inhuman: does politics based on this type of an anthropology always lead to the disturbing strategy of exclusion?

According to Agamben, an anthropological machine, despite transformations it has undergone, still underlies Western politics and produces its terrifying effects.

144           The machine of earlier times works in an exactly symmetrical way. If, in the machine of the moderns, the outside is produced through the exclusion of an inside and the inhuman produced by animalizing the human, here the inside is obtained through the inclusion of the outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal: the man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus*, but also and above all the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form. (Agamben 2004, 37)

Even though politics we know is being actualized as a quest for the inhuman accompanied by the strategy of an exclusion of the latter, the question is, whether we can avoid such results. Agamben claims that metaphysics, despite various attempts to overpass it, “reigns in its most absolute form” (Agamben 1991, 53). However, this stance should not be read as pessimistic or quietist, but rather as a suggestion that only by loosening the knot of metaphysics and philosophy of language the anthropological machine can be overcome.

A very similar point of view is deployed by Rancière, who, like Agamben, anchors the concept of the political as well as the interpretation of the Western history in the founding myth of the institution of political order illustrated by the Aristotelian definition of man as a speaking and political creature:

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Man, said Aristotle, is political because he possesses speech, a capacity to place the just and the unjust in common, whereas all the animal has is a voice to signal pleasure and pain. But the whole question, then, is to know who possesses the speech and who merely possesses the voice. For all time, the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded by means of refusal to hear the words exiting their mouth as discourse. (Rancière 2009, 24)

Politics, hence, becomes a struggle for recognition.<sup>6</sup> The question is, what type of recognition does Rancière speak of here? In his interpretation, recognition equals the rearrangement of the specific space established by the initial division:

Because if recognition is not merely a response to something already existing, if it is an original configuration of the common world, this means that individuals and groups are always, in some way, recognized with a place and a competence so that the struggle is not “for recognition,” but for *another form* of recognition: a redistribution of the places, the identities, and the parts. (Rancière 2016, 90)

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Hence, politics, or, rather, the language of politics, reveals a deeply literary character. Rancière, by referring to the Aristotelian definition of man as a speaking and by that very fact political creature, accentuates not just the linguistic, but also the literary nature of this political identity. He remarks: “[...] man is a political animal because he has the power of logos [...]. I translated this statement by saying that man is a political animal because he is a literary animal.” (Rancière 2016, 143)

Whilst in Agamben’s account of Aristoteles the central role is attributed to the necessary division and exclusion resulting from it, Rancière, along the lines of an initial division, emphasizes the symbolic and interpretative nature of this original division. The acknowledgement of somebody’s enunciation as

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<sup>6</sup> However, it should be stressed that this is the recognition operating on the most elementary level, i.e., as a struggle for being seen (in the literal sense) as equal.

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meaningful refers to a certain symbolic realm which regulates all activity of speaking subjects. As it is clearly indicated by Aristotle, speech is essentially related to the very specific normative frames, that is, to the notions of the just and unjust (Aristotle 1998, 4). Speech is essentially connected with a specific normative or, in other words, it is always related to some interpretation of reality. Rancière emphasizes the interconnectedness of the “natural” dimension with the normative, cultural one:

A distribution of the sensible is a set of relations between sense and sense, that is, between a form of sensory experience and an interpretation that makes sense of it. It is a matrix that defines a whole organization of the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable. (Rancière 2016, 136)

146 Politics is the activity of establishing such a symbolic universe underlying the social and institutional order. But for Rancière’s point of view is vital that politics also means a constant struggle to modify the established symbolic frames. He underlines that politics “is about the construction of the stage and the construction of the position of the speakers. So, it is about *who* is able to give an interpretation. The problem of interpretation concerns *who* is able to interpret, and *in what respect* he, or she, is able to interpret.” (Rancière 2016, 117) From this perspective, the main danger resulting from the natural dominion over an interpretation of the world is the exclusion of the right to speak, the refusal of recognition of certain words as meaningful. Thus, the fundamental conflict takes place on the borders of politics and concerns participation in the space of visibility. In consequence, we should not speak here about the war of interpretations, but, rather, the struggle concerning the space of politics as such.<sup>7</sup>

This shift in the comprehension of politics significantly alters the widespread understanding of politics and the types of conflicts taking place in its sphere. Moreover, the stress put on the literary character of all political

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7 In the discussion with Honneth, Rancière contradistinguishes his aesthetics relating to the original decision establishing the space of meaningful speech from hermeneutics which, according to Rancière, presumes an aesthetics.

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conflicts enables Rancière to disclose problems usually concealed by the more traditional approach, i.e., the importance of the proper use of language for the dynamics of political struggle. However, this quest for the appropriate means of expression is not, at least for Rancière, understood as the search for an original language reflecting a form of life or experience. For it is highly questionable to assume that every group, even the ones excluded from the sphere of recognition, has its own vernacular which may be added or somehow placed within the dominant language.

Along with the issue of a possible enlarging of the political and linguistic sphere emerges another problem referring to the appropriate means of such an enlargement, which, as mentioned above, is an attempt to modify the existing division of places. The problem concerning the foundation of political disagreements is one of specific traits of Rancière's thought which, at the same time, distinguishes his aesthetics of disagreements from other contemporary philosophers who also redefine politics in terms of repressed languages, that is, from Lyotard and Derrida.

Despite Rancière's criticism of Lyotard's<sup>8</sup> and Derrida's ethical radicalism, in his discourse, the reader can find a similar radicalism founding his concept of politics. Suffice it to say that Rancière describes politics, or the ideal of politics, in terms of "handling of a wrong" (Rancière 1992, 59), which is typical of Lyotard politics of justice presented in *The Differend*. In both cases, the wrong designates the type of demand which cannot be expressed within existing language. So, it is apparent that by doing so Rancière accepts Lyotard's perspective regarding the linguistical ethical orientation of politics. Hence, for both thinkers, the act of reparation of the differend should take the form of linguistical recognition. More precisely, this justice equals the invention of linguistical means expressing thus far disregarded demands.

If the wrong cannot find its place within a particular language due to its radical heterogeneity, if a specific language is by nature insensitive to some form of experience, it appears impossible to find the means of expression of

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<sup>8</sup> Rancière, on numerous occasions, expressed his objections regarding the type of ethics founded by Lyotard and distanced himself from the radicality of late Lyotard's writings (cf. Rancière 2011b, 9).

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the wrong within this language. And Lyotard seems to presume the almost infinite flexibility of language, as he writes: “This requires new rules for the formation and linking of phrases. No one doubts that language is capable of admitting these new phrase families or new genres of discourse. Every wrong ought to be able to be put into phrases. A new competence (or ‘prudence’) must be found.” (Lyotard 1988, 13) However, in the other passage of the same text Lyotard emphasizes the difficult character of this main ethical task, i.e., the recognition and attestation of the differends, by writing about the “impossible idiom” (Lyotard 1988, 142). But how could we recognize the differend which, by definition, escapes the rules of our language? And how can we incorporate an element which exceeds the limits of this language?

Although Lyotard did not answer these questions, he nonetheless indicated some of the critical issues concerning our ability to enlarge and transform the language we use, but also our imagination.

148 Contrary to Lyotard, Rancière, due to his specific approach combining reflection on the very nature of language with the history of literature and art, seems to solve the questions concerning the possibility of transgressing the boundaries of language and imagination. He claims:

Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct “fictions,” that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done. [...] Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his “natural” purpose by the power of words. This literary is at once the condition and the effect of the circulation of “actual” literary locutions. (Rancière 2004, 39)

By this specific status of the literacy of man, Rancière introduces art, and literature in particular, as the privileged medium of a transformation of language or—as in this case—of the symbolic order. What seems to be most original in Rancière’s contribution to the reflection on language, is his concept of *misnomers* as the proper way of expressing the forgotten or repressed political identities and demands. The concept of *misnomers*, at first sight, resembles Lyotard’s idea of the impossible idiom, but while for Lyotard the politics of idioms is a strategy

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that needs to be implemented, Rancière argues that improper names are the element of already existing language.<sup>9</sup> As he affirms in his essay on the problem of identity, that “politics is about ‘wrong’ names-misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong” (Rancière 1992, 62). But, what are misnomers? Rancière explains that, although the essential function of these wrong names is to articulate a wrong and manifest an identity, the wrong name, in fact, indicates a gap separating two identities. On this issue he writes:

It is a crossing of identities, relying on a crossing of names: names that link the name of a group or class to the name of no group or no class, a being to a nonbeing or a not-yet-being. This network has a noticeable property: it always involves an impossible identification, an identification that cannot be embodied by he or she who utters it. (Rancière 1992, 61)

Political identity constructed in the impossibility to fill the fracture between already existing subjective positions has the undeniable merit of a relational identity that is related to the outside. Nevertheless, the way a misnomer is presented can raise doubts concerning the logic of recognizing and attesting the yet non-existing identity. After all, the practice of inventing improper names can hardly be comprehended as the movement of self-affirmation of the so far omitted groups. Rather, it represents the usual logic of emancipation or, in other words, the speaking in someone’s name. Therefore, the question emerges whether emancipation as self-determination is even possible or we are doomed to the various forms of emancipation which, nonetheless, belong to the tradition of speaking and acting in the name of the oppressed? 149

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<sup>9</sup> To some extent, his standpoint is similar to hermeneutical concept of natural tendency to create new meanings by innovative metaphors described by Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor*, where the metaphors are apprehended as the transgression of the rules of language, but only by the breach of the regular use the semantic innovation can appear. It seems significant that both philosophers present the ability of language to create new meanings in terms of contravention of the regularity of language, which in the instance, is the necessary trait of the latter.

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Fortunately, Rancière does not limit his reflection on possible forms of taking the rule over language by the strategy of misnomers; he describes another form of bringing thus far omitted groups, their identity, and specific experience into the realm of visibility. In his works on the dawn of the proletarian movement, another practice of creating this “impossible idiom” is described. Contrary to misnomers, the practice of aesthetic reinvention of language is carried out by those who struggle to express their unique experience. In fact, Rancière’s works on the history of the French workers’ movement from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, are a history of such series of aesthetic revolutions effectuated by workers themselves. As Jean-Phillipe Deranty underlines, Rancière has always emphasized the significance of non-material elements of the workers’ movement that he calls, citing Rancière, the “question of proletarian dignity” which, in turn, cannot be separated from the ability to be viewed as a speaking subject. In this context, recognition manifests itself as the ability to speak about oneself or, as Deranty emphasizes, the ability to give oneself a name (Deranty 2016, 38). In sum, the core of political action lies in the ability to speak for oneself and, more importantly, in being recognized as someone being able to determine its own position within the given social or political structure.

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We see, thus, that Rancière apparently supports the traditional concept of political struggle as the fight for autonomy. However, the concept of autonomy understood as freedom to speak for oneself is one of the more problematic notions in Rancière’s thought. Contrary to what could be presumed, although Rancière supports the idea of having one’s own voice, one’s own language as the core element of political activity, it is nonetheless true that his analysis of the workers’ archives challenges the simplistic view regarding the dynamics between experience and its expression through language. While the widespread concept of emancipation is focused on the idea of the “voice from below” struggling to find its legitimate place, Rancière reveals the quite complicated relation between experience aiming at being manifested and the language which by its nature incarnates the worldview of dominating groups. In the “Introduction” to the English edition of his early works he explains:

To the activists with their haste to distinguish voices from below from voices from above, or forms of power from forms of resistance,

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*Les Révoltes Logiques* replied more generally that there are only ever indistinct barriers, at which shifts in the relationship of words to the “real” that they represent define fragile productions of meaning and movable plays of identification. (Rancière 2011a, 6)

This passage suggests that the emergence of a new language reflects new experiences or new subjective positions themselves only through a complicated game involving the existing means of expression. What seems to be at the same time the main advantage and the biggest weakness of this approach, is the problematic line of division between different discourses. Moreover, as the French philosopher remarks, there is no one voice of the people (Rancière 2011a, 5), i.e., we cannot identify a specific language or subjective position as a representation of the fate of a group. In consequence, there is no method to discriminate the “pure” types of expression from those entangled in the existing language.

The genealogy of the workers’ archive carried out by Rancière effectively dissipates the illusions underlying the emancipatory discourse and challenges its metaphors. Moreover, he attacks the fantasies upon which most emancipatory discourses created by intellectuals are founded. As he states with bitterness:

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The intellectuals’ fantasy is that of a discourse of those below with a positivity that would be at the same time pure negativity: the discourse of the dispossessed, the wretched of the earth, those excluded from power, those who have nothing to lose but their chains, and who are moved solely by the desire to be no longer oppressed. (Rancière 2012, 109)

What is “the voice of the oppressed?” Who should be acknowledged as their *porte-parole*? And the most importantly: do the oppressed need such a *porte-parole* at all? In fact, it is highly questionable that one can be a true advocate of the suffering or injustice done to other people. Although adopting this critical position towards the very possibility of a language which would be a pure expression of suffering and a manifestation of the emancipatory aim may be at least problematic, due to its possible negative outcomes, it may be beneficial

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as a counterbalance to the naivety present in the majority of the discourses on emancipation and oppression.

It seems that reflection on language has become one of the focal points of contemporary reflection regarding ethics and politics. It seems that language plays a complex, at least a double role: it is a source of metaphors determining our perception of politics (e.g., the quest for this impossible idiom described by Lyotard which in fact supports the classical concept of political emancipation), but also provides us with the instruments for a critical analysis of the latter. Nonetheless, one may wonder if these two functions are coherent or rather disclose a severe fracture which also marks its presence in the way we comprehend and problematize politics. The search for an emancipatory politics understood as the quest for a system of representation without exclusion is present in the idea of radical democracy developed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the idea of politics as hegemony present in the writings of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe may be read as philosophy recognizing the fact that such a project is impossible and admitting that representation as such is always a partial representation. In other words, politics inevitably is the sphere in which we always speak in the name of the other.

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### **The impossible pedagogy of the oppressed?**

The idea of combining theoretical or even esoteric problems of contemporary reflection with a practical program aiming at a transformation of education may appear at least peculiar. Nonetheless, such a program always requires a sort of normativity, needs to determine an ideal, and in doing so quite often refers (even if the reference is tacit) to a tradition. As it will be argued in this part, such use of tradition, although being necessary, may result in unresolvable difficulties. The following paragraphs will address Freire's project of emancipatory education and will disclose the internal tension permeating his program. It is possible to interpret these internal difficulties as consequences of philosophical assumptions

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<sup>10</sup> In their last book, Negri and Hardt use very strong linguistic metaphors to explain the main goal of their political projects. Moreover, they accentuate that every political action requires a redefinition of the world, its redescription (cf. Negri and Hardt 2017, 152).

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founding the Freirian project. As it will be argued, some of tacit premises explain the visible and inevitable incoherencies of his thought.

Freire, his liberatory, democratic education, is one of the rare examples of thought combining a very traditional approach towards emancipation with the aims or declarations that are apparently incompatible with it. The aim of the analysis developed in this part of the paper is to disclose some of the discrepancies present in Freire's concept of education and to examine the possible sources of these contrarities.

As stated earlier, contemporary reflection on language may be treated as the focal point reflecting the main challenges of present-day political philosophy, and, to some extent, a similar thing might be said about the thought of Paulo Freire. Indeed, when regarded from a theoretical point of view (a discussion regarding practical effects of his educational project exceeds the limits of the paper), the Freirian emancipatory education embodies almost all traditional elements of an emancipatory thought: the dialectics between universality and particularity, the ambivalent place of the subject of emancipation, etc. Not to mention the latent anthropology, which gives his project a very specific dimension, and the fundamental comprehension of education and also politics as the struggle to have a voice.

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The idea of emancipation through education seems to be typical of philosophy, where the truth and concept of man's auto-transformation are complementary elements of the same process. For that reason, Freire's concept of political emancipation operating through teaching illiterates provides an excellent object for such a critical analysis. What seems to give Freire's oeuvre its character, is the fundamental conviction that emancipation can be attained only through working on the educational level. The latter should be understood both as the transmission of knowledge and skills and as the process of unveiling the identity of those who thus far were mute participants in history. Thus, literacy means here much more than an acquisition of a particular skill, it equals the ability to communicate the world we live in. Here, literacy is understood as the only path to a wider community and constitutes the only way to bring into discussion a particular worldview. So, it may be said that the manner in which literacy is apprehended by Freire is

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similar to Rancière's perspective. As he writes in *Literacy*, the language has a productive character (Freire and Macedo 2005, 105). The latter means that language is a space and an instrument of cultural and social conflicts.

The ethical and political stake of the Freirean enterprise is clear: give to the oppressed their voice, so they can express and fight for their cause. We see there two major themes conflating into one project: on the one hand, the core element being the transformation of existing society, and, on the other, the justice defined as the right to have an own language. Moreover, Freire emphasizes the inherently political character of education, which cannot be separated from its social-political milieu. As he underlines: "Besides being an act of knowing, education is also a political act. That is why no pedagogy is neutral." (Freire 1987, 13)

Freire's project of education leading to a more democratic politics and a fundamental transformation of the social structure may be comprehended as the epitome of the Western concept of the place and vocation of man as well as of the nature of politics. As it will be argued in the following pages, Freire's radical democratic education not only inherits the core values and goals typical of Western thought, but also shares its weaknesses.

The first important theme providing the necessary background for Freire's idea of education is an anthropology, which is definitely assumed, but very often tacitly. In the first part of the paper philosophy was interpreted as a set of theoretical gestures among which the most important ones concern the nature of man. As already mentioned, the division through which this nature was determined, reappears in the various philosophical currents regardless of their relationship toward the tradition of Western thought. Freire is no exception in that regard. He introduces his ideas on politics and education viewed as a means through which the vocation of man is realized by contrasting man and the animal.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Freire claims that only human beings have the ability to transcend their condition, while animals remain immured in their instinct.

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11 Freire refers to that concept of man even in his later works. One may find a similar reflection on the division between the natural life of animals and human existence in his *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Freire 2001, 52). Freire uncritically follows the philosophical tradition in that respect. His anthropology contains all the elements: the conviction that animals are not self-conscious, that they do not communicate, and that human form of communication and type of relation to the world are essentially ethical.

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Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness. In this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity. (Freire 2005, 84)

Freire emphasizes the consciousness of the historical character of human being which makes him a creature that needs to learn, and by doing so, needs to transgress historical conditions of his existence. What we see here, is a very interesting interconnection between the unfinished character of reality and man having the ability to reflect this trait, and to transgress particular conditions by his actions. What merits to be noticed, apart from the bond between the natural changeability of the world and the unfinished human nature, is the fact that Freire views education as a natural vocation of man. But what makes his perspective particularly interesting, is the interconnection between “educational” and political natures of man. Freire’s perspective regarding the necessary relation between the political and the educational should not be read as a trivial thesis on the ineluctably biased character of education, but rather as a thesis referring to the inevitable bond between politics and education.

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Education as a specifically human action has a “directive” vocation, that is, it addresses itself to dreams, ideals, utopias, objectives, to what I have been calling the “political” nature of education. In other words, the quality of being political is inherent in its essence. (Freire 2001, 100)

Freire does not limit his anthropological reflection to the theme of consciousness regarding the changeability of the world, but also speaks of a dialogical or communicational essence of man. By doing that, he joins the Marxist but also hermeneutical and phenomenological tradition of comprehending the human being as being anchored in his natural milieu of the material world, but above all, in the social and cultural sphere. These claims

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should not be dismissed or undervalued due to the specific role they play in Freire's concept of education, i.e., they provide normative frames for the latter.

A reading of the Brazilian thinker's works gives an impression that, although Freire declares his openness and the non-oppressive character of his stance, there is a latent normativity permeating his oeuvre. Moreover, the reference to traditional philosophical ideas, the presence of anthropology, gives orientation to Freire's works. The interrelation between anthropology and specific politics has never disappeared from Freire's works, yet its presence is explicitly visible in his first book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where Freire seems to revive the Marxist anthropology along with the dialectics between universal vocation of man and particular struggle of the oppressed.

156 This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (Freire 2001, 44)

We see, thus, that despite the unfinished and undetermined character of man, Freire tends to assume a normative ideal which gives impetus and direction to his project of critical, liberatory education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he speaks about "authentic humanism" or "genuine humanism" which seems to be something more than an attempt to provide a space for the expression of different identities and demands.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the openness of man, Freire indicates another elementary dimension of human being, i.e., its dialogical character. As Freire stresses in the passage devoted to the dynamic of the revolutionary process:

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12 It merits to be noticed than in his later works Freire speaks about a type of universal human ethics, which stems directly from the ontological condition typical of man. This claim may, at first glance, not be very problematic, especially when read as a moderate statement that human being needs to give its life a direction and therefore "naturally" shows its ethical character. But Freire goes much further by suggesting that this ethic is based upon "fundamental archetypes" (Freire 2001, 25).

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The dialogue which is radically necessary to revolution corresponds to another radical need: that of women and men as beings who cannot be truly human apart from communication, for they are essentially communicative creatures. (Freire 2001, 128)

The manner of comprehending the nature of man manifesting itself<sup>13</sup> through certain historical events, as well as the way of understanding the desirable political order presented by Freire, can be very appealing, however there are elements of this vision of radical democratic politics which may be, at least, disturbing.

Freire, as most of emancipatory thinkers, assumes that his project of democratic education is able to realize its goals without repeating the mistakes of traditional education, that is, avoids the imposition of knowledge or, in other words, effectively suppresses all power relations within the process of learning. Freire on various occasions claims that only through his concept of education the voice of the oppressed can be heard and recognized. However, a closer analysis of his writings suggests the opposite conclusion. It seems that Freire's project can function similarly to the traditional ("banking") type of education and serves as the privileged method of shaping the individuals' minds.

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The main issue that should be addressed concerns the eradication of power relations from radical democratic education. Freire too rashly assumes that transformation of the teacher's attitude towards students is a sufficient condition to erase power from teacher-student relation.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, despite his efforts, it seems that the asymmetry of teacher-student relation is inevitable,

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13 Nonetheless, it should be noticed that human nature can be distorted by specific historical conditions. In this regard, Freire remains faithful to the heritage of the early works of Marx and to the idea of alienation of the human nature.

14 This tendency to think of certain models of relations as bereft of domination marks its presence in the manner of problematizing the future political and social relations. Freire is convinced that it is possible to establish a new political order which would abolish the antagonism of the oppressor and the oppressed. He says: "It is therefore essential that the oppressed wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught; and the contradiction will be resolved by the appearance of the new man: neither oppressor nor oppressed, but man in the process of liberation. [...] Resolution of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction indeed implies the disappearance of the oppressors as a dominant class." (Freire 2001, 56)

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and, consequently, the power shaping the latter cannot be abolished. Although even in his early works Freire notices issues generated by the teacher-student dynamic, he shows a tendency to underestimate the consequences of the latter as well as the very possibility of a transmission of power by the relation itself. A reading of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* proves Freire's tendency to underestimate certain elements, to interpret them as purely neutral, and to ascribe all the negative ramifications of these elements to the socio-political context in which they function.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, Freire assumes that by shifting the attitude of the teacher toward the student we are able to avoid the negative effects associated with the formation of an individual through the transfer of knowledge.

Perhaps this conviction inclines him to say that education based on problem-posing, contrary to the traditional ("banking" in Freire's vocabulary) model of education, is bereft of any type of domination. However, the following question arises: whether dialogical, modest attitude of the teacher necessarily leads to the suppression of domination?

158 *Pedagogy of Oppressed* sketches a new perspective on education in which tension or, as Freire says, contradiction between the teacher and the student is "resolved." Regardless of all restrictions made by Freire, one can still legitimately ask, if the dialogue underlying the problem-posing education, i.e., the democratic type of teaching-learning, would suffice to prevent any form of domination slipping in the process of learning.

In the passages devoted to the democratic, dialogue-based education, Freire stresses the absence of a horizontal relation which is constitutive for traditional education where the teacher occupies the privileged place. As he claims:

The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*. (Freire 2001, 86)

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15 In that regard, Freire uncritically follows Marx's attitude towards science, which was for the latter a neutral tool that produces negative, destructive results only in certain social and political frames. As Marx, Freire does not see that there is a possibility of domination hidden in science as such or in the teacher-student relation.

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The problem somehow omitted by Freire marks its presence and allows to ask: who decides when and under which conditions the unclear judgments are replaced with truth? The dialogue-based and problem-focused education should, according to Freire, follow rather the problems stemming from the world, than the goals set by the teacher, but in the last instance, it is the latter who rules over all the stages of the process of learning. Even if in the dialogical education the teacher is supposed to be also a learner, he keeps his position of someone who exercises control over the whole process. Unfortunately, the metaphors applied by Freire only mask the problem of necessary domination which must appear in the teacher-student relation.

This issue returns in various forms in Freire's body of work. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it reemerges as the problem concerning the position of science and its relation to the worldview of the oppressed and as the problem of the political leader, who, in many respects, is similar to the figure of teacher. But before addressing the problem of political leadership and the function of science, I would like to return to the issue of domination inherent in the teacher's position.

While in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire consistently argues that the dialogical education leads to the abolishment of the dissymmetry in the teacher-student relation, his other works shed a different light on this subject. In his *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Freedom*, he very clearly states that every human action must be directive, and directiveness is understood as the inevitable reference to a normative background. In addition, he points out that even the material conditions of education reflect the teacher's perspective, which cannot be viewed as equal to the student's point of view:

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The teacher begins different and ends different. The teacher gives grades and assigns papers to write. The students do not grade the teacher or give the teacher homework assignments! The teacher also must have a critical competence in her or his subject that is different from the students and which the students should insist on. (Freire and Shor 1987, 172)

In another passage of the same book, Freire explains this situation as particularly disturbing for the democratic, liberating education and even calls

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this issue “a contradiction,” which consists in the double task of convincing the students, but in such way so as not to impose upon them one’s own point of view (cf. Freire and Shor 1987, 33). The awareness of irreconcilable principles permeating democratic education is worth to be mentioned, but the solution proposed by Freire is problematic. In short, he tries, not to solve, but rather to dissolve this contradiction by emphasizing the attitude of the teacher. Although the latter has a vital role, this should not be treated as a universal answer for the structural problems. Quite interestingly, a similar problem arises regarding the more political question, i.e., the question of political leadership. Like the teacher, the political leader occupies a privileged position, but, as Freire constantly reminds us, the latter works on the basis of “a permanent relationship with the oppressed” (Freire 2001, 68). The stress put on the necessity of collaboration with the oppressed signifies, at least for Freire, a decisive shift in the group dynamics and results in the constitution of an open, democratic community. As Freire stresses: “The revolutionary’s role is to liberate and be liberated, with the people—not to win them over.” (Freire 2001, 95) Once again, Freire attempts to show that another type of interacting with individuals both in the classroom as well as in political action is possible. And although his efforts are understandable, and perfectly justified from the ethical point of view, there are doubts concerning the latent forms of power which Freire tends to underestimate.

Regardless of the work invested by Freire to persuade us that a democratic teacher and a democratic leader represent a different order founded upon the idea of cooperation, stemming from sympathy and solidarity, it is possible that certain relations are vehicles of domination by their nature.

Objections against Freire’s concept of the teacher-student and the leader-group relations are reinforced by the idea of decoding, playing a vital role in Freire’s original project of education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, decoding is presented as a specific operation allowing the teacher/political activist to recreate the worldview of a group and remodify it subsequently. The logic of this process is of great importance for the understanding of Freire’s thought limitations because it reflects all significant weaknesses of his approach.

In brief, the process of codification is a key practice giving the educators an access to the world of a particular group. It is an incontestable merit of Freire’s

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approach that his view on education reflects the diversity of the cultural and economic universe and attributes to it a pivotal function in the education. However, apart from this fundamental assumption, other dimensions of the decoding might be at least disconcerting.

What seems to be the most problematic part in the whole dynamics of codification, is the place occupied by science. Freire, as already shown in reference to the function of the teacher, accepts the leading role of truth and science. According to his program, the education of the people should be preceded by the effort to understand the worldview of the people who are to be taught. So, this education assumes that educators do not impose from the very beginning a particular content, but rather must include and transform the knowledge received from the students. What merits to be stressed, is the general dynamic of this process. As Freire underlines, the people are not reduced to mere objects of scientific examination, but are an integral part of the research (cf. Freire 2001, 106).

The question, thus, arises if the participation of individuals in the process of decoding eliminates the risk of an objectifying and paternalistic attitude. Although descriptions of decoding concerning the active, co-creative role of individuals whose world is being examined are not problematic, the general goal of this process, nonetheless, may be questioned. Freire states:

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The task of the dialogical teacher in an interdisciplinary team working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation is to “re-present” that universe to the people from whom she or he first received it—and “re-present” it not as a lecture, but as a problem. (Freire 2001, 109)

Freire does not see this exchange as being problematic. However, one may rightfully ask if the operation of recreating a world-view does not imply a certain form of an imposition of the perspective. Nobody, including the revolutionary leaders and democratic teachers, carries the interpretation of reality, why should we, thus, assume that the “re-presentation” of the world effectuated by democratic teachers is not a form of manipulation? The sympathetic attitude of the latter cannot be considered as a decisive argument.

Moreover, there is another, more serious argument against the Freirean model of decoding relating to the cognitive capacities attributed to people.

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As previously mentioned, in various fragments, Freire highlights the equal, active role of individuals being the “objects” of scientific investigation, but the fragments concerning the problem of self-consciousness of the people shed a different light on the issue.

According to Freire’s observation, liberation of the people faces a significant obstacle, i.e., a false identification stemming from an interiorization of norms and ideals of the dominant culture. He says:

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.” The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. (Freire 2001, 45)

162 In the result, what must be challenged, is the false self-consciousness of the oppressed. But if the initial structure of the oppressed, i.e., the groups to which Freire addresses his educational program, is a misinterpretation of their place, how is it possible to treat their opinions as equally important in the process of decoding. Unfortunately, Freire seems to follow the old pattern of the Marxist diagnosis, where the oppressed were able to express their suffering but were incapable of giving it a meaning exceeding the horizon of their lot. Consequently, the role of political leaders and educators is to provide an accurate frame to gather and give the meaning to all individual suffering.<sup>16</sup> But what status should be given to those interpretative frames? Can they be seen as an expression of the “people’s voice?” Or, rather, once again the structure of speaking in someone’s name reemerges?

Freire’s concept of liberatory education and politics tries to unite contradictory themes. When the education and the cognitive skills of the oppressed are at stake, Freire claims that the ignorance of the people is a myth and that every political

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16 “Their vision of the new man or woman is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class.” (Freire 2001, 46)

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activist, and supposedly every teacher, must take this popular knowledge into consideration. But, at the same time, he stresses the different position occupied by the leader (cf. Freire 2001, 134). Once again, we see the same contradiction returning: the need for a leader who knows more, who creates the interpretative frames, and the obligation to treat the oppressed as equal partners in this cultural exchange. This problem takes more acute form in the passage, where Che Guevara's mistrust of the people is mentioned. Quite unexpectedly, Freire agrees with Guevara's point of view and calls it the realist approach. In the result, one can ask if the oppressed are truly recognized and treated as partners in the dialogical process of education and political struggle or, rather, they remain the objects of liberatory, emancipatory activity of the others?

Another problematic question concerns the latent normativity of Freire's approach, which occupies a central place, but remains very vague. He often refers to the above-mentioned universal ethics, which sometimes is connected with the idea of solidarity. Nonetheless, it is difficult to find a deeper reflection on the status of these notions. One may argue that all discrepancies haunting his project are the consequences of a lack of a serious reflection. For example, he very often speaks about solidarity, but never examines the philosophical roots of that notion. In very similar way, he speaks about sympathy which is a vital element in his analysis of revolutionary leadership in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Although it is hard to reject both notions, it is equally hard to accept them without reservations and analysis. It seems that solidarity and sympathy are brought to the Freirean project in their very naïve understanding, as a sort of a natural openness which is a guarantee of mutual understanding.

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In sum, one may argue that the proclivity to introduce philosophically questionable notions is a consequence of Freire's involvement with a quite traditional perspective on humanity and its inherent goals. In that respect, his thought remains rooted in the metaphysical tradition. So, the question is, if Freirean ethics and politics are radical enough?

## Conclusions

The recent reflection on the philosophical presumptions inherent to the Western culture focuses on at first glance secondary questions concerning the

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nature of voice and its interrelation with a peculiar anthropology. Nonetheless, the problematization of these latent presumptions allows us to grasp the regularities of emancipatory discourses. The latter were concentrated on the realization of social and moral justice, which included the task of revealing the point of view, the voice of those who so far were neglected. In short, the historical role of emancipatory politics could be presented as a task of finding and giving the right place to the inaudible voice of the oppressed. But how this process of the discovery is carried out, by whom, and who, in the last instance, has the right to recognize the rightfulness of such a voice?

The other problem, which appears as critical in Freire's work, is the very possibility of such a voice coming from below. Freire, due to his philosophical readings, attempts to incorporate into his idea of education the Gramscian idea of cultural hegemony. And, as a consequence, tends to interpret the worldview created as a result of a decoding of the original popular perspective as a sort of counter-hegemonic discourse, which is the main instrument to express the identity of the oppressed, their political demands, and the incarnation of the idea of justice.

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Although the project is very compelling, the mechanism of decoding seems to obliterate the traditional superiority of those who teach, which is unacceptable from the dialogical perspective. Freire, on the one hand, admits this fact, but on the other, tends to diminish its significance by describing it as a different position and by covering it with a rhetoric of cooperation and equality. And yet, the basic mechanism combined with this "realistic" approach to self-consciousness of the oppressed inclines us to ask, whether the democratic and liberatory education does not recreate the well-known model of emancipation effectuated for the people, but not with the people.

Perhaps, we should, in order to eliminate these discrepancies, reject the idea of a pure voice of the oppressed. And perhaps there is no "idiom" of the oppressed but an incessant practice of mediation, of translation. But, contrary to what Freire suggests, in such a process there are no guidelines and its goal is uncertain.

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