

FROM FREEDOM TO EQUALITY: THINKING POLITICS AND
EDUCATION WITH JACQUES RANCIÈRE

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Abstract

Is there such a thing as an emancipatory education? If so, what does an emancipatory education look like? This is the question that motivates this dissertation. It is also a question that has motivated many other political reflections on education. In part, it is the prevalence of this common concern with the emancipatory capacity of education that inspired the first major claim of this dissertation: a general problematic of freedom and authority seems to frame much of our political thinking about education and this problematic has troubling consequences for our thinking and practice of education, and how we imagine education's relationship to politics. In fact, our way of imagining emancipatory education often seems neither freeing nor radical, and certainly not democratic. Given this, is it possible to reimagine emancipatory education beyond the problematic of freedom and authority? I will argue that it is possible, to a certain degree. Turning to the writings of Jacques Rancière, I will argue that his own rethinking of emancipation and politics translates or shifts us from an emphasis on freedom to an emphasis on equality. Although such a shift may not seem novel, it introduces a new problematic of equality and inequality which is extremely helpful for thinking politically about education. In fact, it allows us to think emancipatory education as a practice of equality—a practice that is doable, democratic, radical, and, perhaps, already in existence.

The first three chapters of the dissertation explore different manifestations of the problematic of freedom and authority and its consequences. The first chapter explores how a problematic of freedom and authority frames the reflections on education of three exemplary modern political thinkers: Max Weber, Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno. The second chapter turns to a few important critiques in the writings of Jacques Rancière which help to flesh out our understanding of this problematic, in particular the consequences of its Platonic lineage. The third chapter investigates common trends in political thinking and practice of education here in North America, and the particular ways the problematic of freedom and authority is mobilized in each case.

With this account of the problematic freedom and authority complete, the final two chapters of the dissertation turn to an exploration of a problematic of equality and inequality. The fourth chapter details how a problematic of equality and inequality emerges in Rancière's writings through his rethinking of emancipation and politics. The fifth chapter outlines the consequences of this problematic of equality and inequality and how it helps us to think emancipatory education differently.

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Introduction:

The following dissertation is the product of two preoccupations: with education and whether it can be a part of any emancipatory, democratic politics; and with the political thought of Jacques Rancière. The first of these stems from my experience as a teacher and the set of worries this unleashed. For instance, much of the discussion in teacher's college and among well-meaning new teachers centred on wanting to promote 'anti-oppressive', 'empowering', 'democratic' education. Unlike their forebearers, or the 'the rest of the system', new teachers and many of those who taught them felt themselves to be a part of a small subset who were going to be inspiring, dedicated and challenging teachers. They could be a part of a new wave that recognized the old, oppressive system for what it was and because of this could organize their classrooms in such a way as to create a critical, yet supportive, environment. In many ways, I shared these assumptions and desires. However, as soon as I tried to imagine what implementing these aims involved, nothing seemed very clear.

Obviously, one could attempt to avoid beating students, military-esque teaching strategies, or lessons that only demanded rote memorization, but was this emancipatory, or merely the new common standard of teaching? Perhaps one could go further and teach students 'critical thinking skills', or about the history and context of various forms of oppression? Or, perhaps one could avoid dictating their learning curriculum at all and instead encourage students to follow their own interests and passions? Quite simply, it was not only that the 'reality' of teaching challenged our 'idealistic' notion of teaching, it was that the process of translating our aims into teaching practices was difficult to say the least. Teaching 'critical thinking', for example, often meant delivering a history lesson or

showing students a formula which would lead them through a series of questions designed to elicit ‘critical’ responses. Since this seemed troubling and unsatisfactory, was it simply a matter of finding a better way to teach ‘critical thinking’, or was teaching ‘critical thinking’ itself an exercise that could ever hope to be emancipatory or democratic?

What was even more troubling about all this was that it seemed that most teachers, those who taught teachers, or those who studied and taught ‘critical’ politics, rarely seemed to entertain the possibility that teaching itself was not an obvious good. In other words, it was clearly a simple and effective strategy for promoting emancipatory or democratic practices. For some reason it was generally assumed that if one hoped to change the world, one of the most obvious and unproblematic routes for this change was education. No doubt many of those of a more radical bent did not think this education could happen in our current school system—this system was clearly riddled with problems, not to mention the prejudices and oppressions of our capitalist order. However, it was nonetheless assumed that an improved and enlightened education could set people on a better path. But what exactly should this improved and enlightened education look like? And, even further, what if education itself was unavoidably authoritarian? What if it could not possibly foster any emancipatory or democratic practices? Would this mean that one should avoid political education altogether? But how then would people come together to change their world? Wouldn’t this mean capitulating to the current order? Or, instead, would this mean that one should embrace a more authoritarian politics and school participants in a new view of the world so as to be able to bring about change?

It was these concerns that formed the basis of my preoccupation. However, part of my continued interest in these concerns sprung from the fact that I maintained a hope for education. There were too many people, great and ordinary alike, who seemed convinced that education was a ‘good thing’ to simply dismiss it altogether. So then, I wanted to know, what made education a ‘good thing’ and in what ways could it be a part of an emancipatory and democratic politics? Was it possible to even imagine what an ‘emancipatory’ education could look like, while also being honest about the authority that most teaching seemed to involve?

My second preoccupation was with the political thought of Jacques Rancière. I came across the work of Rancière early in my doctoral studies when, as a student of politics, I wanted to know what ‘politics’ really was anyway. Unsatisfied with conventional understandings of politics as ‘government’, Rancière’s polemical definitions of politics in texts like *Dis-agreement* and *Ten Theses on Politics* were startling and attractive. Most intriguingly his theory of politics reappropriated ‘democracy’ in a fascinating way. Democracy, according to Rancière, was not a form of government—not our liberal-representative democracies, nor any other more participatory set of institutions—but a political manifestation of equality that challenged an injustice of a given social order. What were the consequences of this understanding of democracy? What possibilities did it open up? Could this kind of democracy be sustained? How would it help us to think about or effect change?

It is in the context of these two preoccupations that this dissertation has taken shape. My general question became this: could the political thought of Jacques Rancière help me to think through my concerns with politics and education? And how might, in

turn, thinking through my concerns with politics and education help me to evaluate Rancière's political thought? In other words, could my two preoccupations be brought together in a fruitful way? My dissertation is an attempt to argue that they can.

In fact, in struggling with the political writings of Rancière alongside problems of education, I eventually came to the conclusion that part of the problem was how we as political thinkers approached problems of education: we kept framing our thinking about education in terms of 'freedom' and 'authority', and this led to certain intellectual and practical dead-ends. In contrast, part of what was so striking about Rancière's writings, and in particular his text the *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, was the focus on equality. The following dissertation tries to develop and explore the consequences of this insight. More specifically, the central claim of my dissertation is this: what is most original in the political thought of Jacques Rancière is that his writings perform what he calls a "redistribution of the sensible". In colloquial terms, his writings shift our focus and in so doing paint a different picture of the world and its possibilities. Through his rethinking of emancipation and politics in particular, Rancière shifts our primary focus from 'freedom' to 'equality'. In so doing, I will argue that he opens up a new problematic of equality and inequality through which we can think problems of politics and education.¹

It might seem that a focus on 'equality' instead of 'freedom' is not such an innovative shift given that 'equality' like 'freedom' is a fundamental concept of most modern thought. Nonetheless, part of the aim of this dissertation will be to try to demonstrate that the consequences of the shift Rancière carries out in his writings are

¹ Rancière himself never discusses this shift to equality explicitly. However, his emphasis on equality is obvious and he does refer to his own method as a "method of equality". See Jacques Rancière "Afterword/The Method of Equality" in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* eds. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 278.

extremely important for problems of both education and politics. Given this, the first part of my dissertation is devoted to mapping out the ways a problematic of freedom and authority currently frames our political thinking about education. I will try to show not only how this problematic shapes our thinking about education, particularly here in North America, but also how it leads to some troubling consequences. In the second part of my dissertation, I will try to show how Rancière's shift to equality takes place. I will argue that through his rethinking of emancipation and politics he translates concerns with freedom and authority into a problematic of equality and inequality. I will also try to show how in his particular framing of a problematic of equality and inequality, Rancière points to new ways to think questions and practices of politics and education.

It is already clear that in this dissertation I will be dealing in rather big and broad concepts. To a certain degree this is unavoidable. However, I do hope these broad concepts will take on some definition as we move. To begin this work of clarification, it is perhaps important to say a little more about what I mean by a problematic of freedom and authority framing our political thinking of education and how Rancière's writings are particularly original and useful in this context.

Arguably, a problematic of freedom and authority frames much of our political thinking about education for the simple reason that concerns with freedom and authority frame much of Western political thought in general. Consider, for instances, some of the political problems that have most preoccupied Western political thinkers: power, sovereignty, consent, ideology, emancipation, oppression, totalitarianism, 'free' markets, revolution, etc. Each of these problems is also clearly a problem of freedom and

authority. Given this tradition, it should not be surprising that concerns with freedom and authority also frame many political thinkers' reflections on education.

Having said this, however, at times political thinkers' and others concerned with education do not approach education *politically*. In other words, they do not consider education as an activity that might raise any sort of 'political' questions—is this just? who benefits? who is harmed? who or what has power? what is being achieved? how might it be organized differently?, etc. In fact, a common approach to education is to consider it merely as a neutral instrument to achieve particular political or social goals. For example, consider some of the political or social goals that education—usually in the form of schools—is frequently called upon to remedy: our glaring democratic deficit, high levels of unemployment and poor economic performance, our failure to respond to looming ecological crises like Climate Change, our deeply embedded racial and class prejudices, staggering levels of social inequality, etc. If education is turned to as a way to address these issues, the primary concern is usually the political or social goal to be achieved rather than the questions raised by the means to achieve it.

Interestingly, if 'equality' is considered in relation to education it is often in this way: education is turned to as an instrument through which one can reduce forms of social inequality that are considered unjust or simply too extreme. Thus, there is a vast academic and policy literature that explores the aim of creating 'equal opportunity' through educational institutions. One of the most influential political thinkers who considers education as a means to achieve more social equality is John Rawls. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls notes that his principles of justice would encourage education to be approached, to certain extent, as an instrument of redress: "since inequalities of birth

and natural endowment are undeserved, these inequalities are to be somehow compensated for [... Thus,] greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more intelligent, at least over a certain time of life, say the earlier years of school”.² However, according to Rawls, education should not solely aim to “even out handicaps”.³ Rather, if certain inequalities in “natural talents” or fortune could benefit everyone, if fostered appropriately in education, then it is just for educational resources to be spent accordingly. As he writes,

Those who have been favoured by nature, whoever they are, may gain from their good fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out. The naturally advantaged are not to gain merely because they are more gifted, but only to cover the costs of training and education and for using their endowments in ways that help the less fortunate as well. No one deserves his greater natural capacity nor merits a more favourable starting place in society. But, of course, this is no reason to ignore, much less to eliminate these distinctions. Instead, the basic structure can be arranged so that these contingencies work for the good of the least fortunate.⁴

For Rawls, then, education is approached as an instrument that should reduce some inequalities and ensure others are directed towards achieving general social benefits. *How* education might do this, or even *if* education can do this, is given little consideration.

To be sure, if people become convinced that education can be the means to achieve a social or political goal, many do turn their attention to the educational reforms that will achieve it. In this vein, recently we may note efforts to: improve civic education in secondary schools in order to reduce our democratic deficit;⁵ develop programs of “twenty-first century learning”, in order to meet the demands of our new economy⁶;

² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), 86.

³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 86.

⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 87.

⁵ See for instance, Henry Milner and J.P. Lewis, “It’s What Happens on the Front Lines of Civic Education Policy that Matters: Reflections on a Natural Experiment of Youth Turnout in Ontario,” *Canadian Political Science Review* 5, 2 (2011): 136-137

⁶ “BC Education Plan”, last modified May 27, 2013, <http://www.bcedplan.ca/>

institute forest schools⁷ or the United Nations current decade of Education for Sustainable Development⁸ in order to address our ecological disconnect; revitalize public education⁹ or establish alternative schools, such as the Aboriginal Focus School through the Vancouver School Board¹⁰ and the African-centered school recently established in Toronto District School Board¹¹, in order to address systemic racism; or, improve access or quality in education in order to guarantee “equal opportunity”.¹²

In debating and designing these educational reforms many ‘political’ questions can remain bracketed. However, for those engaged with the practical problems of instituting these reforms, the problem of authority seems inevitably to demand attention in one way or another. For example, implementation might raise questions like: what should be the content of our curriculum? What are our specific goals? Who decides this? Who is included in our program and who is not? What do we do about disagreements that arise over the curriculum or over how we implement it? What do we do if certain teachers or students or parents or members of the community vehemently oppose what we are doing? How can we avoid imposing our views or ways of thinking on students? How do we actually design a program that will achieve our specific goals? How is what we are doing anything different than what we have done before? In fact, consideration of the

⁷ “Nature Kindergarten: learning outside the box”, last modified May 27, 2013, <http://naturekindergarten.sd62.bc.ca/>

⁸ “Education for Sustainable Development”, last modified May 27, 2013, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-sustainable-development/>

⁹ See for instance, Walter C. Parker *Educating the Democratic Mind* State (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1-21

¹⁰ “Aboriginal School”, last modified May 27, 2013, <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/aboriginal-school>

¹¹ “Afrocentric Alternative School”, last modified May 27, 2013, <http://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/afrocentricschool/Home.aspx>

¹² See for instance the Council of Ministers of Education Canada report in 2012 for UNESCO, “Promoting Equality of Educational Opportunity”, last modified August 14, 2013, http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/289/2012.11_Promoting_Equality_of_Educational_Opportunity_EN.pdf

practice of education itself seems to demand that the problem of authority be addressed: what should this authority be, how might we limit its influence, how might we avoid its worst effects?

For some, these concerns with authority in education become connected to corresponding concerns with freedom. To be sure, at times appeals to freedom are tokenistic, appearing mostly in policy objectives or mission statements, and are given little thought. After all, which educational program does not claim to foster some kind of ‘freedom’ in its program—self-sufficiency, independence, critical thinking, creativity, thinking for oneself, free individual development, etc.? Indeed, the aim of fostering some kind of freedom in education is ubiquitous, even if often superficial. However, concerns with authority in education can work to increase concern with the lofty goal of promoting freedom. One may turn from the question of how to avoid indoctrination in an educational program, for instance, to the question of how to actually foster whatever freedom the program aims to promote. What should encouraging freedom in education look like? How would this be different than other more authoritarian approaches to education? In this way, concerns with authority in education have a way of connecting up with concerns with freedom in education.

These concerns with authority and freedom are also mirrored in established academic traditions. In fact, it is impossible to tackle problems of education today without having to engage the rich and varied tradition that critiques the authority that manifests itself in schools. For example, there are those who examine how schools

reproduce the social order;¹³ those who critique schools for killing creativity;¹⁴ those who critique our schools' overvaluation of rationality, rote learning and memorization and rationality;¹⁵ those who study how our schools reward some kinds of intelligence and not others;¹⁶ those who explore how our schools encourage and represent some groups, while limiting and excluding others;¹⁷ those who critique our schools as instruments of colonization;¹⁸ those who lament the fact that schools primarily engage in indoor learning;¹⁹ those who critique our schools for their abstract curriculum detaching students from the particulars of their place²⁰, as well as those who attempt to show how particular political agendas—such as neoliberalism, multiculturalism, or religion—have infiltrated our schools.²¹ And what is at the heart of all these analyses of schools is a critique of authority. More precisely, a critique of how an authority of one kind or another manifests itself in our schools with troubling consequences.

Thus, it seems that if one pays attention to what actually happens in educational practices and institutions, whether as a practitioner or as an academic, questions of

¹³ See for example, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 1990; or, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reforms and the Contradictions of Economic Life* Toronto: Harper Collins Canada, 1977.

¹⁴ See for example, Ken Robinson *Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative* North Mankato, Minnesota: Capstone, 2001.

¹⁵ See for example, Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* New York: Continuum, 1970.

¹⁶ See for example, David Orr *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect* Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2004.

¹⁷ See for example, Myra Sadker and David Sadker, *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994.

¹⁸ See for example, Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies* London: Zed Books, 2012 or Marie Battiste "Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a decolonized approach to aboriginal knowledge, language and education" *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (22) 1, 1998.

¹⁹ See for example, Richard Louv *Last Child in the Woods*, Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2008.

²⁰ See for example, David Sobel *Place-based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities* Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2005.

²¹ See for example, Heather-Jane Robinson *No More Teachers, No More Books: The Commercialization of Canada's Schools* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998, Richard Dawkins television documentary *Faith School Menace*, last modified August 15, 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulX8nZjeCXE>, or Allan Bloom *The Closing of the American Mind* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

authority are often the most obvious and the most pressing. How are educational programs promoting, manifesting, reproducing, rewarding or punishing certain ideas, skills, behaviour and traits and not others? What are the consequences of this? What should we do about it? Much of our political thinking about education begins here.

In fact, it is within this frame that we again see concerns with ‘equality’ appear. For instance, if schools are thought to be a means to reduce social inequality, then an obvious question to ask is: do they actually? As a consequence, there are many studies that try to examine and explain why and how schools fail to reduce social inequality. Interestingly, however, in so doing the focus of these studies often becomes authority, rather than inequality or equality: how does a particular authority mould students for a particular station in life, how does a particular authority exclude or marginalize students, how does a particular authority reward certain traits of the already-privileged, etc.²² The problem of authority in schools is examined, in other words, in order to explain social inequality. Thus, although ‘equality’ is the ideal motivating these studies, it is often given little attention.

In fact, a common critique of our thinking about education is that there has been too much focus on what’s wrong with our educational programs and not enough on what actually can be done. Or, in other words, there is a general worry that the focus been almost exclusively on the problem of authority in education.²³ It is with this in mind that

²² Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron’s analyses of schooling are the most famous examples of this, but for more current examples see David Baker, Bruce Fuller, Emily Hannum and Regina Werum’s edited volume *Inequality Across Societies: Families, Schools and Persisting Stratification* Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005 or Mike Cole’s edited volume *Education, Equality and Human Rights: Issues of Gender, ‘Race’, Sexuality, Disability and Social Class* New York: Routledge, 2006.

²³ See for example, Henry Giroux *Theory and Resistance in Education: a Pedagogy for the Opposition* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1983) 235.

some academics turn their attention to the problem of ‘freedom’ in education. For some academics, then, the problem of freedom is an extension of the problem of authority: if the central problem that has frustrated education is ‘authority’, what might a ‘free’ education look like?

Most often, however, concern with ‘freedom’ in education seems to originate elsewhere. In fact, unlike the critiques of schools, I would argue that considerations of ‘freedom’ in education tend not to be inspired by studies of educational institutions or ruminations about effective educational practices, but rather with our more general hope for what education should or could be. To be sure, many may draw upon moments of enlightenment or transformation or independence they have experienced in educational settings in their reflections, but often concerns with freedom come from outside the educational setting. In fact, I would argue that as one of the most gripping and deep-rooted ideals of our culture, it is an ideal that is *applied* to education. We consider ‘freedom’ one of the most important human ends, and thus we think it must also have a place in education.

As one might expect, how the ideal of ‘freedom’ is applied to education can vary greatly. However, within Western culture there is a long history, beginning at least with Plato, of linking freedom within education to a specific way of thinking, a specific way of thinking that ‘frees’ us from an oppressive social authority. Indeed, in a very general way, one could point to the importance of the connection between ‘freedom’ and ‘thinking’ in the writings of many of the most influential political philosophers of our present era: Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, John Rawls, Chantal Mouffe, James Tully, etc. Given this, it is not surprising that when these same political

philosophers turn their attention to education, it is assumed that one of education's most crucial tasks is the promotion of some kind of 'free thinking'.²⁴ Indeed, our political philosophers, policy makers and educational practitioners all seem to agree that promoting 'free thinking' in education is essential.

This hope for education creates a paradox, however. On the one hand, we hope that education will 'free' us from our ignorance, prejudice or oppression. On the other hand, education seems necessarily to be an authoritative practice: the method and content of a lesson inevitably communicates a certain 'authority', and the figure of the teacher itself seems fundamentally authoritative. Moreover, to complicate matters, as any parent of young children knows, this authority is not only unavoidable but it is often desirable as well—people must be taught how to be social beings who play, share and live with others. Thus there seems to be a fundamental tension in education between its authoritative character and our commitment to its 'freeing' capacity. For many, and perhaps for politically-minded thinkers in particular, this tension or paradox of education is deeply troubling. In fact, as we shall see in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, there is a common desire among modern political thinkers to address this tension or paradox in some way, and as such a wide range of 'solutions' to it—some foolish, some worrisome, some oppressive, some perceptive. The problem for many is: how do we transform education so that its authoritarian dangers are minimized and its freeing capacity is encouraged?

²⁴ In Chapter 1, I will investigate some of the complexities of this connection by focusing on the key works on the subject of education by three exemplary modern political thinkers: Max Weber, Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno.

However, as Walter C. Parker, a student of Dewey, wisely remarks: “Attempts to devise a theory that overcomes the natural tension between the two [contradictory roles of education] are futile”.²⁵ Although Parker is likely correct that this tension or paradox cannot be resolved—and therefore those who attempt to resolve it are misguided—it also cannot be ignored or dismissed. For, as we shall see in Chapter 3, attempts to smooth over this tension or paradox within education are often just as troubling as the attempts to resolve it.

It is in the context of this deadlock that Rancière’s writings are both useful and original. In part, Rancière’s writings are useful because he too is deeply troubled by this paradox of education. In fact, his peer, friend and fierce critic Alain Badiou argues that the political ramifications of this paradox are what motivates Rancière’s work. In his essay, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière: Knowledge and Power after the Storm” Badiou tries to show how Rancière’s intellectual journey began as a result of their experiences as students of Louis Althusser during the political upheavals in France in the late 1960s.²⁶ He argues that this context raised the following fundamental question for those concerned with politics, particularly on the left: if the knowledge and authority of traditional figures and institutions must be critiqued and undone, what kind of education can one have in its place? Can there be “transmission that is not an imposition?”²⁷ According to Badiou, then, the crucial problems of politics, for both Rancière and himself, were tied up with the problem of education. According to Badiou this demanded a “struggle on two fronts”, which he claims for Rancière meant:

²⁵ Parker, *Educating the Democratic Mind*, 16.

²⁶ Alain Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière: Knowledge and Power after the Storm,” trans. Tzuchien Tho in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 35-36.

²⁷ Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 34.

a struggle against the idea that politics can be dependent on science in institutional transmission, a model according to which politics should be taught to the ‘ignorant worker’ and ‘common people’ by experts or a party of the working class. However, Rancière struggles equally against the idea that politics is a blind spontaneity, a strange vital conceptual energy totally encapsulated by the gesture of revolt. There is neither a knowing party at the foundation of the movement, nor an immanent vital movement.²⁸

In other words, their situation dramatized the problems with both the authoritarianism of institutions and the dreams of a natural and free politics. It asked one to think politics—and therefore education—beyond the extreme poles of ‘authority’ and ‘freedom’. In fact, Badiou argues that unlike other Marxist students of their generation, what distinguishes Rancière, as well as himself, is that they never turned their back on the questions that this formative context raised. This explains, according to Badiou, their shared ongoing preoccupation with Plato; for if one is struggling with questions of politics and education, and the problem of authority and freedom it seems to raise, who better to read and interrogate?²⁹

Indeed, Badiou’s analysis highlights how what we have been calling the paradox of education is also a paradox of politics, and of a radical or transformative politics in particular. How can one have a radical or transformative politics that avoids teaching people how they must be different and yet also avoids pretending that no teaching or knowledge is required within a transformative politics at all? Although I think Badiou’s analysis is extremely perceptive in its description of how this paradox animates Rancière’s work, it is also misleading insofar as he suggests that Rancière sets out to resolve it.³⁰ Instead, I would argue that what we can see in Rancière’s writings is a continued wariness of ‘authority’ and a fundamental preoccupation with emancipation. In relation to the first, evidence of Rancière’s wariness of ‘authority’ is everywhere: in his

²⁸ Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 41.

²⁹ Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 38.

³⁰ Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 48.

critiques of utopia, of the figure of the intellectual, of racism, of the hatred of democracy, of schools, of particular thinkers like Plato, of aesthetic theory, etc., as well as in certain of his central concepts—such as ‘the police’ or ‘the distribution of the sensible’. What is interesting about this wariness for our purposes is that it leads to certain critiques of authority that add further dimensions to the paradox we have outlined. As we shall see in Chapter 2, Rancière’s critiques of schools, our common understanding of emancipation, and ideology, all of which are also critiques of Plato, highlight some disturbing features of our thinking about education. More specifically, Rancière’s critiques highlight forms of authoritarianism in our thinking about education that are often overlooked, and, most importantly, the anti-democratic nature of much of our thinking about the ‘freedom’ we hope education will promote. Rancière’s analysis draws our attention to a history of thinking about education that is profoundly aristocratic and oppressive, which survives surprisingly untroubled today despite our democratic pretences and desires.

Rancière’s writings are most original and useful, however, as a result of his preoccupation with emancipation. In various places in his work, Rancière discusses how his early works in particular were motivated by a concern with emancipation: “how can those whose business is not thinking assume the authority to think and thereby constitute themselves as thinking subjects”?³¹ What is it exactly that inspires people to act, to change, to transform their situation? What might ‘education’ have to do with this? It is this question of emancipation that led him to the archives and to the investigations of nineteenth century workers’ writings, and, in turn, it was these investigations that became

³¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), xxvi; see also, Jacques Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière,” *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009), 115.

the basis for the books—*Proletarian Nights*, *La parole ouvrière*, *The Philosopher and his Poor*, and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*—where Rancière engages in a rethinking of emancipation.

Thus, contrary to Badiou’s analysis, Rancière’s writings were primarily motivated by an attempt to understand emancipation, not resolve a paradox. In fact, one could argue that much of his writing is an attempt to follow out the consequences in different contexts—literature, art, politics, education, etc.—of his fascination with, and insight into, emancipation. Rancière himself points out that his rethinking of emancipation that underlies the rethinking of politics that he develops in his later works.³² He also tellingly remarks, “any mode of thinking that is the least bit singular reveals itself in always basically saying the same thing, which it cannot but hazard every time in the colourful prism of circumstances”.³³

What is at the heart of Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation is his realization that people “had never needed the secrets of domination explained to them, as their problem was quite a different one. It was to withdraw themselves, intellectually and materially, from the forms by which this domination imprinted on their bodies, and imposed on their actions, modes of perception, attitudes and language.”³⁴ And, in place of this world of domination, to assert and manifest a “common” world where their equality could be verified.³⁵ Therefore, although the problem of emancipation is on the one hand framed by a problematic of freedom and authority—the question is still how does a

³² Rancière, “A few remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière”, 115.

³³ Rancière, “A Personal Itinerary” in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, xxviii.

³⁴ Jacques Rancière, “Preface to *Proletarian Nights*”, *Proletarian Nights*, trans. John Drury, (London: Verso, 2012), ix.

³⁵ Rancière, “Preface to *Proletarian Nights*”, ix and xi.

person become ‘free’ from an oppressive situation—Rancière’s rethinking of it emphasizes how emancipation is less a ‘freeing’ enlightenment and more a determined effort to demonstrate and practice equality. In fact, Rancière describes emancipation as a process or performance or enactment of equality.³⁶ What frees a person is the experience of demonstrating and verifying equality, rather than learning a particular truth, arriving at a new insight, or the awakening of one’s consciousness. It is the enactment of equality that is at the heart of emancipation, and freedom is a “pleasure” which can accompany this experience.³⁷

As such, it is not that ‘freedom’ and ‘authority’ disappear from view, but that Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation shifts the emphasis from freedom to equality. This shift is extremely important for Rancière, as it helps him address two particular problems which concern him: first, how to break away from the tradition of thinking about emancipation as a process of being freed from our enslaving ignorance and the troubling consequences this tradition has for radical or transformative politics; and second, how to address the problem of sustaining a radical or transformative politics without this politics itself instituting a new, totalizing and oppressive social order. Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation opens up a new way for him to conceive these problems. However, it is also extremely suggestive for our considerations of education and the paradox it seems to pose. For example, Rancière’s analysis demands that we pay more attention to practices of equality, it focuses our attention on the possibility of the ‘equality of intelligences’, and it requires that we reconceive the relationship between politics and education.

³⁶ See Jacques Rancière, “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization,” in *Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 63-65; or Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 276.

³⁷ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 276.

Moreover, as I will explore in Chapter 5, in the context of the deadlock that characterizes much of our political thinking about education, Rancière's shift towards a problematic of equality and inequality is inspiring. If we think problems of education through a problematic of equality and inequality, I will try to show that: first, this problematic is less polarizing than the problematic of freedom and authority and thus the paradox of education can be approached as a productive tension rather than as a problem that demands extreme measures to resolve it; second, the focus on equality demands that we question our continued application of the ideal of freedom to the educational situation; third, the focus on equality allows more consideration of the relationships between people that occur in education and in politics; fourth, this problematic is suggestive for thinking about the possibilities of democratic forms of education; and finally, this problematic of equality and inequality encourages us not only to think differently about potential practices of politics and education, but also encourages us to examine already existing practices in a new light. In fact, this seemingly simply shift in focus to equality opens up a myriad of new possibilities to consider.

Unfortunately, however, most of Rancière's interpreters do not emphasize this shift to equality nor take up the possibilities it suggests. Instead, most seem to want to pull his thought back into a problematic of freedom and authority. For example, a prevalent theme among Rancière's 'political' interpreters is that Rancière's politics favours the anarchic and disruptive—for some this is positive, but for most this suggests a failure to admit the importance of political organization and institutionalization.³⁸

³⁸ See, for instance, Jodi Dean's "Politics without Politics" *Parallax* Vol. 15, Issue 3, 2009: 20-36; Alain Badiou's discussion in *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker, (London: Verso, 2005), 121-123; Nick Hewlett's critique of Rancière in *Badiou, Balibar and Rancière: rethinking emancipation* New York and London:

Rancière's writings are therefore critiqued as being overly enamoured with freedom without an appreciation for the necessity of authority. In contrast, however, among his 'educational' interpreters a common concern is Rancière's concept of authority. There is a shared sense that Rancière may have discovered an authority that could enable a truly emancipatory education.³⁹ Despite these contradictory focuses, what is common to both sets of interpreters is the desire to evaluate Rancière's writings through a problematic of freedom and authority. Again, this should not be altogether surprising given the prevalence of this problematic, but it does obscure what I would argue is most interesting and original about Rancière's work.

Therefore, it is with some irony that I begin this dissertation with an extended exploration of the problematic of freedom and authority and how it shapes our political thinking about education. In part, this is so as to emphasize the extent to which it frames our thinking about politics and education, but it is also so as to highlight its troubling characteristics and limitations. In so doing, however, I clearly run the risk of further entrenching and extending the problems that are particular to this problematic. However, it is a risk I will have to take. In Chapter 1, therefore, I set out to better understand this problematic of freedom and authority. To this end, I turn to three modern political

Continuum Books, 2007; Bruno Bostells' article "Rancière's Leftism, Or, Politics and Its Discontents", Gabriel Rockhill's article "The Politics of Aesthetics: Political History and the Hermeneutics of Art" and Peter Hallward's article "Staging Equality: Rancière's Theatrocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality" in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* eds. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009, etc.

³⁹ See, for instance, Maria Beatriz Greco's *Rancière et Jacotot: Une critique du concept d'autorité*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007; Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta, *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation* London and New York: Continuum, 2010; Charlotte Nordmann *Bourdieu/Rancière: La politique entre sociologie et philosophie*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, 2006; Sarah Galloway "Reconsidering Emancipatory Education: Staging a Conversation between Paolo Freire and Jacques Rancière," *Educational Theory* Vol. 62, Issue 2, 2012: 163-184.

thinkers' reflections on education—Max Weber, Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno—in an effort to unpack how exactly this problematic frames their thinking. This analysis will highlight how these thinkers are struggling with the paradox of education I have outlined, and it will illuminate the particular connection these thinkers make between 'freedom' and 'thinking'. I will also suggest that the way we consider this paradox of education, including this connection between freedom and thinking, is part of a Platonic lineage. However, I will also argue that this paradox deepens in the modern era when concerns with individual free-thinking are heightened, thus leading to an increase in concern with the authority of the position of the teacher.

In Chapter 2, I extend this initial exploration of the problematic of freedom and authority by turning to three critiques of Rancière's that deepen our understanding of this problematic: first, his critique of the common tendency to turn to education as an authoritarian means to solve social or political problems; second, his critique of our common understanding of emancipation and its consequences for politics and education; and third, his critique of modern discourses of ideology. Each of these critiques again alerts us to the widespread influence of Plato over our current approaches to education, as well as the authoritarian and aristocratic consequences of this influence. However, the critiques of Rancière's that we examine in this chapter do more to increase our understanding of the problematic of freedom and authority, than they do to displace it in any way.

In Chapter 3, with this general context having been laid out, I turn to how the problematic of freedom and authority plays out in prevalent thought and practices here in North America. The first two sections of this Chapter explore what I have termed the

mainstream and radical approaches to thinking education, and each of these sections examines both the ‘thought’ of practices as well as exemplary political thinkers in this tradition. My analysis of the mainstream and radical approaches to politics and education will try to show how attempts to deal with the ‘paradox of education’ push people towards dogmatism and individualism. In both cases ‘democracy’ becomes compromised. In the third section of the chapter I turn to two thinkers, Allan Bloom and John Dewey, who provide more insightful analyses of education and its paradox. However, even Bloom and Dewey’s analyses are ultimately unsatisfactory if one hopes for a democratic education that is potentially radical or transformative.

With the subtleties and pitfalls of how the problematic of freedom and authority frames our political thinking about education more firmly in place, I turn again in Chapter 4 to the writings of Jacques Rancière. The first two sections of this chapter explore how Rancière’s shift to equality develops in his writings through his rethinking of emancipation and politics. In the third section, I explore the consequences of this shift to equality for Rancière’s own work.

Following from this analysis, in Chapter 5 I try to flesh out the parameters of the problematic of equality and inequality that is suggested by Rancière’s writings. In the first section, I lay out the consequences of this problematic for our understanding of the relationship between politics, emancipation and education. In the second section, I present some of the reasons this problematic is more useful than the problematic of freedom and authority for thinking about education politically. Most importantly, perhaps, I argue that it helps us think past the paradox of education, which currently frames so many political analyses of education. Finally, in the third section, I briefly

suggest how the problematic of equality and inequality provides a more interesting and productive lens for analyzing currently existing practices of education.

Chapter 1: A Problematic of Freedom and Authority

How do political thinkers think about education? What problems appear crucial for us to resolve? What associations are taken as obvious? What ideals guide our aims for educational practice? This chapter will begin the effort to map in more detail how worries about freedom and authority have shaped our political thinking about education. There are many possible ways to start the mapping of this problematic. One point of entry is to bring together three great modern political thinkers' reflections on education—Max Weber, Theodor Adorno and Hannah Arendt—to see how their thinking overlaps. These political thinkers' reflections on education are of particular interest for a number of reasons: first, because they are startlingly powerful and nuanced; second, because they have had a significant influence on contemporary debates; third, because they articulate very different visions of the relationship between politics and education; and finally, despite these different visions and different general intellectual projects, because they share a similar 'frame' for thinking problems of education. What this shared frame illustrates is how a concern with the 'paradox' of education motivates their analyses. And, in turn, their analyses of this paradox also give us more insight into the nuances of how 'freedom' and 'authority' shape our thinking of education. Read together, then, their reflections on education point towards how concerns with 'freedom' and 'authority' tend to come together to form a particular problematic of freedom and authority that shapes our thinking about education.

In their essays on education, Weber, Adorno and Arendt all have two major concerns: first, they are concerned with the nature of the authority involved in education; and second, they are concerned with independent thought, or 'free' thinking, and how

education might promote, or inhibit, this. On the first of these concerns, for instance, Weber in his lecture “Science as a Vocation” is careful to distinguish between the authority drawn upon by the rhetorical appeals of politics and the authority that a teacher should manifest in the University classroom. He states, emphatically, “that the prophet and the demagogue have no place at the lectern”.⁴⁰ The teacher’s authority must be different from the political leader’s authority, because for students to learn they must be free from the kind of coercion used in politics. Indeed, the coercive authority that is employed in politics is dangerous when coupled with the hierarchical authority of the teacher-student relation as it threatens to destroy the possibility that students will learn to question and think for themselves: “it is all too easy for [a teacher] to display the courage of his convictions in the presence of people who are condemned to silence even though they may well think differently from him”.⁴¹

Similarly, Arendt in her essay “The Crisis in Education” tries to define the authority involved in education against the authority of persuasion employed in the political realm.⁴² She argues that education “can play no part in politics, because in politics we always have to deal with those who are already educated. Whoever wants to educate adults really wants to act as their guardian and prevent them from political activity”.⁴³ For Arendt, the authority of education is fundamentally conservative, and cannot be the authority that exists in politics between equals.⁴⁴ The authority involved in education is the authority that derives from the superiority of adults—parents and

⁴⁰ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” *The Vocation Lectures* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 20.

⁴¹ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 25.

⁴² Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education,” *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 172.

⁴³ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 173.

⁴⁴ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 188.

teachers who “take responsibility” for introducing the world, for helping the child to find his or her place in this new and unfamiliar world.⁴⁵

And, again, Adorno in his “Education After Auschwitz” argues that education must be reformed and fight against the cold and twisted authority, described in the *Authoritarian Personality*, which promotes the personality and the consciousness that allowed Auschwitz to occur.⁴⁶ The authority that permeates the social and political world, and thus also the realm of education, encourages people to “blindly slot themselves into the collective” and in so doing “already make themselves into something like inert material, [and so] extinguish themselves as self-determined beings”.⁴⁷ It is this demented, barbaric authority which education must work against, by fostering critical self-reflection.

Thus, each of these great modern thinkers is putting forward an evaluation of an authority that threatens, in some way, ‘free’ thinking. In fact, what is clear even from this brief commentary is that the two central preoccupations we identified are linked. The authority in education must be specified so that independent thought can be protected and nurtured. Indeed, in these essays Weber, Arendt, and Adorno are all primarily concerned with preserving a space, or creating an atmosphere, where independent thought can flourish.

For Weber, cultivating this free-thinking is the goal of education: “the most challenging pedagogic task of all is to explain scientific problems in such a way as to make them comprehensible to an untrained but receptive mind, and to enable such a

⁴⁵ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 182.

⁴⁶ Theodor Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz,” *Critical Models*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 200.

⁴⁷ Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz”, 198.

person—and this is the only decisive factor for us—to think about them independently”.⁴⁸ In fact, it seems that for Weber the proper home for such free-thinking is scholarly activity, which education is intended to promote. He describes it as an “inner vocation”⁴⁹ that draws upon passion: an “intoxication (in the sense of Plato’s ‘mania’) and ‘inspiration’”.⁵⁰ Weber is also clear that this dizzying power of independent thought is not an experience of the political world; in politics there is the inspiration of leaders, and perhaps also the refreshing bite of their criticism, but not the complete freedom of thought that can be experienced in education, in scholarly activity. This is why Weber insists that teachers must not be leaders⁵¹: they must not inspire students with their own views and justifications, but “compel a person, or at least help him, to render an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions”.⁵² This is also why the authority drawn upon by the political leader should be distinguished from the authority of the teacher: the quality of a teacher should not be decided by “ludicrous popularity contests”, but by their ability to instigate independent thought.⁵³ Weber even suggests that, insofar as a teacher succeeds in encouraging students to practice independent thinking, such education is “in the service of ‘ethical’ forces”.⁵⁴ One imagines that a student might apply such practices of independent thought in the political realm, but clearly the space which preserves and promotes this free-thinking is to be found in scholarly activity.

In contrast, Arendt argues that education’s aim should not be the promotion of free-thinking, but rather to prepare children for the world for which they will later

⁴⁸ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 6.

⁴⁹ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 7.

⁵⁰ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 10.

⁵¹ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 24.

⁵² Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 26.

⁵³ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 6.

⁵⁴ Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, 27.

become responsible.⁵⁵ As she writes, “the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living”.⁵⁶ However, it is also evident that the reason Arendt insists so forcefully on the distinction between education and politics and the authority that belongs to these, is because she too wants to protect independent thought from an authority that will overwhelm it. Unlike Weber, however, she identifies this threatening authority with the realm of education rather than the realm of politics. In education there is an authority based on the inequality of participants, there is a hierarchy based on age, knowledge and experience of the world; in politics there is authority too, but the participants are equals.⁵⁷ Because of this undeniable hierarchy from which the authority involved in education draws its power, education is not the place, according to Arendt, to promote independent thought. Education’s role is, rather, to teach children about the world so that they can be free-thinking equals once they join it:

Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative.⁵⁸

Arendt locates free-thinking in the political realm; indeed, in the series of essays in *Between Past and Future* in particular, she wants to stress the political origin of freedom. For instance, she argues in her essay “What is Freedom?”: “in spite of the great influence the concept of an inner nonpolitical freedom has exerted upon the tradition of thought, it seems safe to say that man would know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free as a worldly tangible reality”.⁵⁹ What Arendt wants

⁵⁵ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 186.

⁵⁶ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 192.

⁵⁷ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 189.

⁵⁸ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 189.

⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?” *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 147.

to show is that it is in politics, where independent thought and action can coincide, that free-thinking can manifest itself most meaningfully. Interestingly, she also uses some very similar language to Weber in describing the “miraculous” and “inspiring” experience of this freedom.⁶⁰

However, to return to our main point, this desire to emphasize the location of freedom in politics helps to make sense of Arendt’s elusive comments at the end of her essay on education. As we have said, she argues in this essay that education must be conservative, that it is no place for politics, and thus, one might imagine, no place for safe-guarding free-thinking. And yet, she also writes:

One cannot educate without at the same time teaching; an education without learning is empty and therefore degenerates with great ease into moral-emotional rhetoric. But one can quite easily teach without educating, and one can go on learning to the end of one’s days without for that reason becoming educated.⁶¹

The distinction she makes here between education and teaching, or education and learning, seems to be an admission that independent thought (if we can assume that this is what she means, at least in part, by ‘learning’) does in fact occur within education, even if this is not the aim of education. What this suggests, is that although it is the political realm, rather than the educational realm, where freedom can really come to life, independent thought can take place in either. The authority involved in education may be counter to independent thought, and education should not aim at cultivating it, but, nevertheless, independent thought must find its way into education, so that education does not simply become “moral-emotional rhetoric”.⁶² Thus, although Arendt wants to argue that the political realm is the place of freedom, and that the authority of the

⁶⁰ Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, 168.

⁶¹ Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 192.

⁶² Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, 192.

educational realm is incompatible with this freedom, she admits that learning—some inspiring experience independent from the authority of the educator—should take place in education. And, moreover, it is education’s place to protect this capacity for free-thinking, even though it does not cultivate it, so that when the student becomes an adult, an equal in the political realm, she will be able to exercise her capacity for free-thinking together with her capacity for action.

Finally, more similarly to Weber, Adorno suggests in “Education after Auschwitz”, and in another essay concerned with education, “Taboos of Teaching as a Vocation”, that the realm of education might be a place where one could begin to break with the kind of destructive authority that has come to dominate both the political and educational arenas. He writes,

Debarbarization of humanity is the immediate prerequisite for survival. School, its limited domain and possibilities notwithstanding, must serve this end, and therefore it needs to be liberated from the taboos, under whose pressure barbarism reproduces itself.⁶³

According to Adorno, this does not mean that what is required is teaching more civilized subjects or principles, it means instead that it is necessary to change the taboos, the mechanisms, and the ideas by which a person becomes capable of participating in Auschwitz.⁶⁴ To this end, he argues that the “only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection”.⁶⁵ Or again, “The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating”.⁶⁶ Clearly,

⁶³ Theodor Adorno, “Taboos of Teaching as a Vocation” *Critical Models* trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 190.

⁶⁴ Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz”, 193.

⁶⁵ Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz”, 193.

⁶⁶ Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz”, 195.

Adorno is signalling here that education might be able to foster free-thinking, or “enlightenment”—independent thought and critique of accepted norms and practices embodied by the self and society—against the dominant authority of both education’s institutions and those of politics.

Thus, Adorno shares with Weber a hope that free-thinking can become the aim of education, although he is clearly less optimistic about free-thinking’s current place within education. Moreover, as with Weber, this capacity to think freely somehow contains the hope for a more ethical and just world—a world where Auschwitz will not happen again. To foster this hope for a better world, however, requires different steps: for Weber it means protecting the realm of education from the authority involved in politics; for Adorno, on the other hand, it means studying how the authority that led to Auschwitz manifests itself in education, and thereby learning how to change education itself so that it is no longer imbued with such an authority. One could also argue, in fact, that Arendt shares with Weber and Adorno this hope in free-thinking—it is through the exercise of freedom that the new has a chance to come into existence—however, unlike for Weber or Adorno it is not education, but politics, which creates the space for this possibility of freedom. For Arendt, education merely protects the new, or the children, by introducing them to the world as it exists; education must not teach the children how to be new—how they might want to change the world or themselves. In so doing, the hierarchical authority of education will not pollute the hope for a better world that the children contain. Interestingly, therefore, all three political thinkers find hope in the human capacity for free-thinking.

Also of note, it seems that all three thinkers share a sense of the danger that education's authority can have—it can destroy the hope that free-thinking promises. For Weber, the danger stems from the authority involved in politics, of *any* politics, infiltrating the realm of education. To avoid this danger one must simply prevent the authority involved in politics from having a place in education. For Adorno, on the other hand, the authority over education is dangerous if it mimics the political authority that led to Auschwitz, and thus the solution must be to find a *different* authority for education, although not necessarily an authority that will not also become a political authority. For Arendt, the danger of education's authority is intrinsic to education itself: it springs directly from the hierarchical authority of the teacher over the student. Therefore, for her, to limit the danger of this authority in education one must limit education itself, or more precisely its aim—one must distance education from any task of teaching students how to think. Thus, to summarize, Weber idealizes education as a realm that can be free from any oppressive authority, Adorno argues that education can be a realm where free-thinking is cultivated, if only it can overcome the demented authority that now dominates it, and Arendt abandons education to its conservatism—it should simply carry out the task of slotting people into the world.

These wildly different attitudes toward education, however, clearly stem from a shared desire to protect freedom, in particular the capacity for free-thinking, from an authority that could crush it. Weber, Adorno and Arendt all seem to see this capacity for free-thinking as something fragile, which must be cultivated in just the right way. In fact, for Weber and Arendt in particular, this means finding a *place* for free-thinking, a *place* where it can in some manner escape the influence of the authority of the day and flourish.

For Adorno, there is no such safe place for free-thinking, the authority of the day oppresses everywhere; and yet, the realm of education might be a place where this authority could be resisted and challenged. What is also interesting is that it seems that their different perspectives on *where* and *how* to cultivate free-thinking influences their different perspectives on education and its relationship to politics. *Where* and *how* free-thinking can flourish determines what role education can have, and to varying degrees what role politics can have, in the creation of a more just world. Indeed, for each of these three political thinkers' a desire to protect and cultivate the capacity for free-thinking motivates and shapes their analyses.

This desire to protect and cultivate the capacity for free-thinking is quite common-place among those who consider themselves to be 'independent' or 'critical' thinkers today. In fact, one could attribute this protective desire to our Platonic legacy: Plato's *Republic* suggests that the ultimate purpose of the just political community and its educational system is the protection of this capacity for free-thinking and by extension those who are capable of it. The just political community must be governed by philosopher kings so that the passions, prejudices and *authority* of society are controlled and managed in such a way that they do not turn on those who think, question, and pursue truth. Education must perform the dual task of cultivating the best for the higher life of the mind, and training the many for their respective positions in society with the aim that they will never destroy those capable of free-thinking. Above all else, what must be sheltered is this capacity for thought, for, when exercised in the proper manner, it is this capacity that is tied to all that is just. We have seen that this association of free-thinking with what is just and good is also evident in Weber, Adorno and Arendt's

essays. The reason that there is a desire to protect free-thinking in the first place is because it is associated with what is good. And, moreover, what *threatens* free-thinking is an un-thinking, conservative and popular authority. Thus, it is not simply that Weber, Adorno and Arendt share with Plato a desire to protect and cultivate this capacity for free-thinking, they also share a fear of a social authority that can oppress.

What is clear, then, is that reflection on the intersection between politics and education provoked a concern with a similar problem for our three modern thinkers: how can free-thinking be encouraged in light of an authority involved in education that threatens it? What is also clear is that this particular problem is one articulation of a more general concern with the tensions between freedom and authority. How can freedom be achieved? How can the dangers of an oppressive authority be overcome? Indeed, even though Weber, Arendt and Adorno do not all map out ‘freedom’ and ‘authority’ between ‘politics’ and ‘education’ in exactly the same way, their reflections on education are all framed by a problematic of freedom and authority. Consideration of issues of education seems to draw them into it.

In fact, it offers a couple of general problems for consideration; for instance, as was already noted, a general problem our three modern thinkers are trying to address is the tension between free-thinking and a social authority which can crush it. What is interesting about this general problem is that it is inherited from Plato. It is Plato who first poses issues of education and politics in terms of tensions between freedom and authority, and it is Plato who articulates the specific problem of how to foster thinking that leads to freedom, truth and justice, in light of an oppressive authority of common opinion. It is his writings which initiate the idea that thought is normally under the sway

of social custom and authority, but when it is exercised in the right way it experiences a dizzying and inspiring experience of freedom: a simultaneous enlightenment and emancipation; it is his writings which initiate the idea that this inspiring experience of freedom is linked to gaining access to knowledge and truth; and, it is his writings which initiate the idea that politics—more specifically, democracy—and education have a fraught relationship thanks to the tension between the authority of common opinion and the thinking that leads to truth and freedom. Now, to be clear, I am not suggesting that Weber, Arendt and Adorno directly repeat Plato's arguments concerning politics and education in their essays. However, they do seem to be struggling with a shared, general problem. Moreover, given this inheritance, it is perhaps not surprising to claim that there are connections and associations that belong to this general problem that are worth questioning further.

However, before we move on to questioning these consequences in the following chapters, it is important first to note that Weber, Arendt and Adorno are not only concerned with the general problem of free-thinking and social authority inherited from Plato, they are also concerned by another general problem: the hierarchical authority of the teacher. I will argue that this second general problem stems from a modern rather than Platonic association between free-thinking and *the individual*. Indeed, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the 'critical turn' in philosophy, all led to a general understanding of 'free-thinking' as closely associated with the individual. In contrast, for Plato free-thinking could happen between two: the relationship between teacher and student, Socrates and his interlocutor, did not crush thought, but rather propelled thinking. In fact, the dialogue between master and pupil could in many ways be said to dramatize the

dialectic of thought itself. In modern times, however, free-thinking becomes synonymous with independent or autonomous thinking. The image that dramatizes this thinking is no longer the Socratic dialogue between master and pupil, but the lone and isolated thinker who is courageous enough to think against the grain. Free-thinking is something that happens when one is alone; it is an autonomous activity.

If free-thinking is understood as an independent, individual activity, this complicates the problem of freedom and authority in education greatly. One has to be concerned not only with the authority of the social and political realm dominating what is learnt, but also with the authority of the teacher oppressing the individual student and their capacity to think freely. For example, all three of the modern thinkers we examined are troubled by the authority of the teacher because it seems to pose a threat, in and of itself, to a students' capacity to think freely. Weber, for instance, insists that teachers must remain politically neutral not simply because they might inculcate bad opinions, but because their very authority as teachers is too influential. If students are to be able to think freely, the teacher must restrain himself, must keep his own power in check. This power of the teacher is also why Arendt dismisses education completely from trying to be anything but a conservative, reproductive institution. In her view, no matter how neutral the teacher, his authority will shape students views so the teacher must stick to teaching about what already exists in the world, not what might exist. The teacher's hierarchical authority is unavoidable, and thus education cannot be the place where free-thinking flourishes. Similarly, Adorno spends a good deal of time in his essay "Taboos of Teaching as a Vocation" exploring how the 'teacher' has come to elicit a mixture of scorn, fear and injustice: "The image of the teacher repeats, no matter how dimly, the

affect-laden image of the executioner”.⁶⁷ He claims the reason for this is partly due to long-time practices of corporal punishment, but also due to the “the objective situation of the teacher” which places him as a meagre but often tyrannical authority over students.⁶⁸ It is the teacher’s position of authority which makes him a threat to the student’s capacity to think freely.

To be sure, one could argue that Plato was also concerned with a teacher’s ability to abuse their authority—he certainly was no fan of the sophists who taught the youth of Athens. However, what concerned him was not so much the fact of the teacher’s authority but what that authority could be used to teach. In other words, what troubles Plato is not the teacher’s authority over their students, but that the teacher can use this authority to teach students lies, foolishness, and common opinion, as well as a dangerous belief in a general, democratic access to knowledge. Whereas, for our three modern thinkers, there is something specific about the fact of the authority of the teacher over the student that is dangerous if it is not constrained in the right way.

Thus, because of a shift in the understanding of ‘free-thinking’, there comes to be a specific worry among modern thinkers about the authority of the teacher. In fact, with this shift in understanding in the modern era, the ‘problem’ of authority and freedom in education becomes a ‘paradox’: one must somehow resolve the contradiction of how one can cultivate freedom in education despite the hierarchical authority of the teacher. In Kant’s *Thoughts On Education*, for instance, although he himself is relatively untroubled by the authoritative and hierarchical nature of education, he does articulate the paradox

⁶⁷ Adorno, “Taboos of Teaching as a Vocation”, 183.

⁶⁸ Adorno, “Taboos of Teaching as a Vocation”, 186.

that nags many modern thinkers. In a passage that seems to have inspired Arendt in particular, he writes:

One of the greatest problems of education is how to unite submission to the necessary *restraint* with the child's capability of exercising his *freewill*—for restraint is necessary. How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint? I am to accustom my pupil to endure a restraint of his freedom, and at the same time I am to guide him to use his freedom aright. Without this all education is merely mechanical, and the child, when his education is over, will never be able to make a proper use of his freedom.⁶⁹

Education necessarily involves limiting a student's freedom, and yet its ultimate purpose is to prepare students for freedom. More specifically, a child must learn to be disciplined and obedient in order that later he will become "independent". The ideal teacher combines the power of social authority and the master's authority: they teach, cultivate and punish from above, until the day they stop. Once the student's tutelage is over, the teacher disappears and the student moves from a position of dependence to independence. Free-thinking can only fully be exercised once this independence is achieved; thus, education is not about *teaching* free-thinking, but instead about preparing students for the free-thinking that can flourish with independence. However, somehow—and this is where the mystery lies—this authoritative preparation must be done in such a way that a student's capacity to think freely is not completely crushed. So, we have this strange situation where education must prepare students to think freely, and yet this ability to think freely is held in abeyance until the day they suddenly become independent and in the meantime they must submit to the authority of the teacher.

Although Kant is not as daunted by this demanding task, many of those he influenced were. Particularly if education involves adults, as it does in the University, this demanding task causes much consternation. Indeed, the very different visions of politics

⁶⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Kant on Education (Ueber Paedagogik)*, trans. Annette Churton, (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1900), paragraph 29.

and education that Weber, Arendt and Adorno express, can be seen as a consequence of their different attempts to resolve this problem of the authority of the teacher and the threat it poses to free-thinking. As we have seen, Arendt seems to have been convinced enough about the severity of this problem of education to dismiss it altogether from any task of concerning itself with free-thinking—its sole object must be to prepare children for the world. Thus, she attempts to resolve the paradox of education by limiting its reach and influence. However, neither Weber nor Adorno are so ready to abandon the common-sense view that education can help people to see or think differently. Their solutions, therefore, focus on trying to limit or transform the hierarchical authority of the teacher: for Weber through the promotion of neutrality, for Adorno by overcoming the authoritarianism of the teacher to thereby foster self-reflective students who are neither hard nor cold. Thus, for the three modern thinkers' we have looked at there is an additional concern with authority: how can the authority of the teacher's position be controlled or limited so that it does not oppress the individual student's capacity to think freely?

To summarize, the shift in understanding of 'free-thinking' that is articulated in the seminal works of philosophers like Kant, leads to a heightened concern with the authority of the teacher, which, in turn, necessitates a more complex schema of freedom and authority in relation to politics and education. There are at least two general problems to contend with: the threat of social authority and the threat of the authority of the teacher. In fact, in the modern era if education is approached from within the problematic of freedom and authority, it can seem like quite a disconcerting activity for those seeking to augment freedom. It is far easier to imagine freedom-as-autonomy in politics, for

example, than it is in education. Education seems to pervert or threaten the ideal of the autonomous self, because it seems to call for a relationship between teacher and student, or at very least a relationship between two. If education must involve relationships, and most likely a hierarchical relationship, how can it promote an autonomous self? How can education fit into a vision that aims towards political autonomy? How can we even imagine an education that is free from social authority and the authority of the teacher?

As a consequence of such problems, many political thinkers decide to ignore questions of education altogether. It is much easier to begin with political situations that assume autonomous, adult actors and where all authority can be imagined as something that it is possible to overcome. Others, who are more determined to address issues of education, find they must somehow confront the paradox of education established by the problematic of freedom and authority.

Chapter 2: Rancière and our Platonic Inheritances

Like our three modern political thinkers, in many ways Rancière's engagement with questions of education is also inspired by the dual problems of the threat of social authority and the threat of the authority of the teacher. What has preoccupied Rancière most, however, is less the nature or content of these authorities within education, and more the hierarchies they create and enforce. In fact, Rancière has long been interested in the connection between the teacher's intellectual authority in the classroom and social hierarchies between those who work with their minds and those who work with their hands, those who think and those who do not, those who are enlightened and those who are duped, etc. We can see evidence of this set of concerns, for example, in his early critiques of his own teacher and mentor, Louis Althusser, and his (late/absent) response to the events of May 1968.

In his book *Althusser's Lesson*, Rancière argues that what is ultimately at stake for Althusser is his own status as the "communist philosopher".⁷⁰ This is what leads Althusser to try to distinguish himself from other intellectual pretenders and undermine those whose thinking or political efforts challenge his authority. According to Rancière, it is also what leads Althusser to dismiss the political protests of 1968 and to call for students to sagely listen to their teachers.⁷¹ Part of what concerns Rancière in his analysis of Althusser, therefore, is how this motivation of the intellectual to safeguard their own position produces troubling consequences: for example, the intellectual's role becomes sacrosanct, this reinforces problematic distinctions between theory and practice, truth and

⁷⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 21.

⁷¹ Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, 35.

illusion, etc., and as a consequences of such distinctions our thinking of emancipation, politics, and education all become affected by the hierarchical divide instituted between the intellectual and everyone else.

Interestingly, concern with such hierarchical divides never really disappears for Rancière. As he writes in his preface to *Althusser's Lesson* many years later:

My book declared war on the theory of the inequality of intelligence at the heart of supposed critiques of domination. It held that all revolutionary thought must be founded on the inverse presupposition, that of the capacity of the dominated [...] It is clear that I would not subscribe to some of [the book's] claims and analyses today. Still, I have not changed when it comes to the principle which guided them, namely that only the presupposition of a capacity common to all can found both the power of thought and the dynamics of emancipation.⁷²

In subsequent analyses, however, rather than the focus being his former mentor, the foil is Plato. As Rancière himself admits, his analyses almost always “begin” with Plato.⁷³ In fact, the motivation of the intellectual that Rancière explores in *Althusser's Lesson* is attributed in later writings to a more widely shared Platonic inheritance. It is Plato who Rancière argues initiates the schema outlining the particular role and superiority of the intellectual. A central aim of many of Rancière's analyses is, therefore, to highlight the consequences that follow from this schema and explore what they mean for our thinking of problems that occupy the borderlands between education and politics.

Given this, one of the most useful features of Rancière's analyses for us is how they shed light on Plato's continuing influence over our thinking of the paradox of education. It is for this reason that in this chapter we turn to three critiques in Rancière's writings that are directed at Plato and problems of education: his critique of the debate about the role of schooling in France, his critique of our common understanding of

⁷² Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, xvi-xvii.

⁷³ Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia, “Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière,” *Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (2000), 115.

emancipation, and his critique of ideology. In different ways, these critiques all probe the fundamental motivation of the intellectual. What Rancière claims they suggest, in their indirect way, is that the fundamental motivation of the intellectual springs from a desire to safeguard free thinking, the same desire we noted in Weber and Arendt, and to a lesser extent Adorno's, writings. Egoism and self-interest are, then, not the sole explanation of the intellectual's effort to maintain their position, this effort must also be explained by a desire to protect free thinking and the truth, goodness and justice associated with it. Moreover, what Rancière's analysis highlights is how this desire to safeguard and protect free thinking is part of a deeply rooted Platonic schema at whose foundation is an assumption that some people are capable of free thinking and some are not.⁷⁴ It is this assumption of inequality which requires that intellectuals be protected. Indeed, if it is assumed that only some people are capable of free thinking, then it follows that these people and their ideas must be protected from those incapable of free thinking. The intellectual must be sheltered as the being capable of free thought, or, less personally, the position and role of the intellectual must be sheltered in order to ensure the possibility of free thinking. Accordingly, the assumption that people have unequal capacities to think freely has far-reaching aristocratic and antidemocratic consequences.

⁷⁴ To be sure this assumption of inequality is somewhat ambiguous in Plato. In Book VII of the *Republic*, for example, Socrates claims that "the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body". This suggests that everyone has the innate capacity to 'think freely'. Yet, it is also clear from what Socrates says about the need to turn the whole body, as well as his remaining discussion in Book VII of the education required to achieve this turning—in other words, to really achieve the capacity to think freely—that in most cases, for all intents and purposes, this capacity is not realizable for all but the select few. Thus, as Rancière's analysis emphasizes, this gesture towards equal capacity is overshadowed by the fact that only the philosopher can attain the level of education necessary to truly be capable of free thinking. See, Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A Grube, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 190.

The power of Rancière's critiques are, then, two-fold: on the one hand, they highlight how this Platonic schema is shared by a diverse set of intellectuals and policy-makers today; and on the other hand they trace out the connection between the assumption that grounds this schema—there are those who can think freely and those who cannot—and various aristocratic, antidemocratic and even authoritarian intellectual and policy positions. That this is done in the context of addressing questions of education, makes his critiques even more illuminating for us. Indeed, the implication of Rancière's critiques is that if Plato's schema for thinking about 'free thinking' within education is kept in place, then our approach to education will inevitably be antidemocratic. No matter how democratic and egalitarian our aims, if we accept that 'free thinking' can only be practiced by a select group of people our education will be aristocratic and perhaps even authoritarian.

In fact, Rancière's critiques complicate our understanding of Plato's influence over the paradox of education. As we saw in Chapter 1, Plato introduces the omnipresent dichotomy between an oppressive social authority and a thinking that can free. And it is Plato who introduces the idea that education plays a key role in fostering this free thinking. Therefore, he introduces the problem that initially motivated this dissertation: what does an emancipatory education look like? Or, in other words, he institutes a basic problematic of freedom and authority which shapes what problems appear crucial for us to resolve. However, Rancière's critiques also reminds us that Plato's own approach to education was not straightforward. Although it is Plato who gives us the idea of an emancipatory education in opposition to an oppressive social authority, he also turns to education as an authoritarian means. Indeed, Plato often seems to ignore the problem of

an oppressive social authority altogether and simply embraces education's power to shape and mould minds. Arendt, for example, attributes this authoritarian approach to education to Plato; she writes: "He who seriously wants to create a new political order through education [...] must draw the dreadful Platonic conclusion: the banishment of all older people from the state that is to be founded."⁷⁵ Indeed, Plato appears content to use education as a means to institute his desired social authority.

Therefore, Plato presents two seemingly opposed approaches to education, which Rancière's critiques suggest are still dominant today: turn to education to institute your desired social authority, and turn to education to 'free' people from the influence of an oppressive social authority. Again, it is Plato's desire to safeguard free-thinking, and those capable of it, which explains his contradictory approaches to education. For, if one hopes to safeguard free thinking, education both provides the means to introduce the select few to free thinking, and the means to keep those incapable of free thinking at bay. Thus, education may at times be directed toward keeping the unthinking masses in their place, and at other times to 'freeing' the masses from their dangerous or misguided opinions. Education may be used to institute authority, 'free' people from authority, or 'free' the thinking of the philosopher. In Plato's schema these conflicting approaches to education are all essential to the task of protecting free thinking.

Although for Plato this does not create a 'paradox', since he suggests he can clearly distinguish between the education that instils a particular social authority among the masses, the education that 'frees' the masses from dangerous opinions, and the education that 'frees' the philosopher—for his inheritors it often does. This is in large

⁷⁵ Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", 174.

part because his inheritors are generally reluctant to consciously advocate the use of education as an authoritarian means, even if they approach education in this way. Therefore, for many of Plato's inheritors, there is often a desire to ignore or suppress the fact that education is being used as an authoritarian means or there is great consternation about the authoritarian aspects of practice and aspirations for freedom. In other words, when Plato's schema remains mostly in place—but *without* his distinctions between kinds of education and who should receive them, or, put otherwise, *alongside* more democratic aspirations—this can really intensify the tensions between authority and freedom within education. Put simply, it creates a true paradox of education. Thus, as it is inherited, Plato's schema establishes a troubling paradox of education, particularly for modern democrats.

This, however, is anticipating the explorations we will take up in Chapter 3. In this chapter, we will focus on how Rancière's critiques illuminate a more complex Platonic inheritance that shapes our thinking and approaches to education. The first of these critiques highlights the common tendency, inherited from Plato, to turn to education as an authoritarian means, or in Rancière's terms, as an instrument of social harmonization. The second of these critiques explores the hierarchical consequences of Plato's understanding of emancipation for politics and education. Finally, the third of these critiques examines Plato's influence on modern discourses of ideology. In all cases, Rancière's analysis explores the aristocratic and antidemocratic consequences of these Platonic inheritances and their widespread influence on our thinking to this day.

The Aim of Schooling

At some point in almost all of his overtly political texts, Rancière draws our attention to the debates about schooling in France. For example, in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, *On the Shores of Politics*, *Disagreement* and more recently in *Hatred of Democracy*, he refers to the public wars between ‘republicans’ and ‘sociologists’ about the proper role of the school system, why it is not working as well as it might, and why working class children, or children of immigrants, fail to excel.⁷⁶ As Kristin Ross, one of Rancière’s best interpreters, explains this debate about the proper role of education exploded on the French scene in the early 1980s.⁷⁷ Concerns with education came to a head in part thanks to the intellectual influence of the sociological critiques of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron which described in detail the mechanism through which educational institutions reproduced and shored up the power and privilege of the elite, and in part thanks to a general anxiety about French identity and social inequality provoked by increased immigration. Two polemically opposed positions emerged: on the one hand there were those influenced by the sociological critiques of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron who wanted to reform the education system in the name of equality, and on the other hand, there were those who wanted to uphold educational standards and who claimed that ‘equality’ would only be achieved if the Republican aims of ‘science’ and ‘rationality’ were maintained.

⁷⁶ See, Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 170-179; Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1995), 53-55; Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 68-69; and Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steven Corcoran, (London: Verso, 2006) 28-29 and 63-70.

⁷⁷ Ross, Kristin. “Translator’s Introduction” *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* trans. Kristin Ross, xiii-xix.

Interestingly, this debate did not simply play out between more conservative and progressive sections of French society, but also within Mitterrand's own socialist government. As Ross reports, in 1981 Mitterrand's first education minister, Alain Savary, attempted to introduce widespread educational reforms, only for his successor in 1984, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, to halt these reforms and call for a back to the basics approach inspired by the principle of "republican elitism". These particular debates provided the immediate context for Rancière's engagement with questions of education in *The Philosopher and His Poor* and *On the Shores of Politics*, as well as of course his text devoted to questions of education—*The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. One of the intellectuals that Rancière responds to by name is Jean-Claude Milner, who published a book in 1984 called *De l'école*, which offered a scathing critique of the efforts to institute 'progressive' educational reforms. Rancière was clearly responding to Milner in works like *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, and Milner continues to be the target of many of his critiques—for example, *Hatred of Democracy* is partially inspired by Milner's *Les Penchants criminels de L'Europe démocratique* [The Criminal Inclinations of Democratic Europe].

However, Rancière's own analysis does not simply side with the 'progressives'. Rather, Rancière interjects his own critique against both positions within the debate. His central contention is that the 'sociological' and 'republican' positions are not as opposed as they seem; both are extensions of the Platonic project. He argues that both positions envision education as an instrument of social harmonization whose task it is to set aright the disorders of democracy. First, Rancière contends that although the republican position is generally traced back to Rousseau and Machiavelli, its Platonic link is more telling in this instance: for what the debates about education reveal is a desire for a "regime of

homogeneity between State institutions and social mores”.⁷⁸ The republican position aims not simply to uphold universal standards of ‘science’ and ‘rationality’, it also seeks to make society compatible with these universal standards. It is this desire for a direct fit between laws and society that requires the turn to education. Just as was necessary in Plato’s *Republic*, the population must be formed, guided and educated to uphold and embody the spirit of the laws. The law must reflect the populace, and vice versa. Rancière claims that this task of education exposes a tension within republicanism between its more egalitarian and elitist visions. More egalitarian republicans aim through education to reform the stratified society that exists into a more unified and equal society under the banner, say, of ‘Science’, ‘France’, or ‘Equality, Liberty, Fraternity’; whereas more elitist republicans aim through education to maintain a largely stratified society but better equip and distribute the population according to their abilities within these strata.⁷⁹ Despite this tension, however, Rancière argues that all articulations of republicanism always imply “the work of education that establishes or re-establishes harmony through laws and mores, through the system of institutional forms and the dispositions of the social body”.⁸⁰ Education, whether it is elitist or egalitarian in intent, is the mechanism that harmonizes the laws of the community with the community itself.

And it is this desire for harmony between laws and the people that Rancière also identifies in the sociological position. According to Rancière, this position also has its internal rifts between those who denounce the school system altogether, and those of a more optimistic bent who call for the reform of the elitist and oppressive school system.

⁷⁸ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 64.

⁷⁹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 68.

⁸⁰ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 65.

The former's critiques suggest that the elitism and hierarchies of schools cannot be easily addressed, whereas the latter claim that if the marginalized were given more attention and specialized curricula, the systemic bias favouring the 'inheritors' could be overcome.⁸¹

What is common to both strands, however, is that the focus of their attack is the division that exists between the school system and the people. What is implicit in their critiques and arguments for reform is the assumption that there is a divide between the school and the population that ought to be overcome, schools are failing to include the children of the working class and immigrants into the society, children of the working class and immigrants ought to be let in, ought to belong to France and be reclaimed by societal institutions. In short, it is assumed that schools should be an instrument of inclusion rather than exclusion. Schools must be revolutionized or reformed so that they, as a societal institution, truly reflect the population.

As Rancière argues, this is partly a consequence of the fact that the mode of analysis used in the sociological critiques of schools was invented by Plato. In many different contexts in his work Rancière states that the "science" of sociology (as well as psychology, anthropology, political science, or the social sciences in general) was founded by Plato and is his most influential legacy.⁸² According to Rancière, this Platonic legacy has two important features to note. First, it "invents a 'concrete mode'" of analysis that describes in detail various ways of life in order to determine the laws or forms that these ways of life express.⁸³ Second, it invents a style of analysis of "suspicion, of *looking underneath*" in order to find the hidden truth beneath appearances, a truth that

⁸¹ Ross, "Translator's Introduction".

⁸² See, for instance, Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 35; Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 3; and, Rancière, *Disagreement*, 68.

⁸³ Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," trans. Rachel Bowlby and Davide Panagia, *Theory & Event* 5, no. 3 (2001), Thesis 9.

actors in a situation can never properly see.⁸⁴ As such, it initiates a science engaged in the “ritual of demystification” and denunciation.⁸⁵ It is the first of these two features that concerns us most in the context of his critique of schools. For it is this ‘concrete mode’ of analysis that is employed by the sociologists in their descriptions of working class and immigrant students, which in turn sparks their demands that schools better match the ways of life they have detailed. Indeed, according to Rancière, Plato does not simply initiate a descriptive style of analysis, but more importantly an implicit aim for this analysis: to arrive at descriptions of ways of life which will allow what is described to be properly understood and ordered. The motivation behind the sociological mode of analysis, in other words, is to describe ways of life so as to create the institutions and laws that will embody their spirit. As Rancière explains in *Disagreement*,

Plato invents the regime of community interiority in which the law is the harmony of the ethos, the accord between the *character* of individuals and the *moral values* of the collective. He invents the sciences that go with this internalization of the bond of community, those sciences of the individual and collective soul that modernity will call psychology and sociology.⁸⁶

The sociological analysis is thus motivated by the desire “to found the community on the basis of a univocal partition of the sensible”.⁸⁷

We can see, then, the similarity with the republican position. Both positions view schools as an instrument of harmonization: currently, people do not match up well with the laws and institutions of society—which may be a failure on their part, or a failure of societal laws and institutions, or both—however, in order to get a better fit education must be mobilized towards the end of social harmonization. School is the answer to a

⁸⁴ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 44.

⁸⁵ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 44.

⁸⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 68.

⁸⁷ Rancière, *Ten These on Politics*, Thesis 9.

more just society. The difference between the sociological and republican position is simply the place of departure—is it best to begin by forming people so that they fit the institutions and the laws of the community, or by mapping the people so that we can fit the institutions and the laws of the community to them? As Rancière summarizes, “Republicanism and sociology are, in this sense, two names for the same project: to restore beyond the democratic rupture a political order that is homogeneous to the mode of life of a society”.⁸⁸

But why, you might ask, is this desire for social harmonization anti-democratic? Put simply, Rancière traces the desire to use schools as an instrument of social harmonization back to a more fundamental anti-democratic desire inherited from Plato—the desire to keep people in their proper place. In fact, Rancière’s critique of the debate about schooling in France he draws from a critique of Plato that he develops more extensively in *The Philosopher and his Poor*. What concerns Rancière in this critique is Plato’s injunction that everyone must mind their own business and keep to their proper place.⁸⁹ As he argues, one of Plato’s central refrains is that everyone must do what they do, not try to do more than one thing, nor try to imitate another’s role.⁹⁰ But why? Rancière argues that the two related reasons Socrates offers in the *Republic* for this injunction—the division of labour and differences in natural capacities—are lies.⁹¹ Relatively open lies, in fact.

Rancière contends that Socrates’ claim about the division of labour in a just city—“More things are produced, and better and more easily, when one man performs

⁸⁸ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 64.

⁸⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 67.

⁹⁰ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 29.

⁹¹ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 27.

only one task according to his nature, at the right moment, and is excused from all other occupations”’—is quite obviously insufficient.⁹² For, why should a shoemaker or a farmer be excused from all other occupations? Why on earth would a shoemaker or a farmer have no time for anything other than farming or shoemaking? What about all the time a farmer might have in the winter months? And how many shoes does Plato’s hypothetical town of five people really need? Could not a shoemaker make shoes *and* farm a small plot of land? This strictly enforced division of labour seems ridiculous if much thought is given to its application.

So, then Rancière turns to the second reason Socrates offers for the necessity of everyone doing only one thing and keeping to their place—differences in natures and aptitudes. Here, Rancière reminds us that Plato actually underscores that this explanation is a lie: the myth of the metals is just a *story* one tells to justify the injunction to do only one thing.⁹³ There is no shoemaking nature; what defines the shoemaker is not his natural capacities for shoemaking but his work as a shoemaker, or more precisely, his “wage-earning labours”.⁹⁴ Thus, Plato admits that there is no nature before the education or training that accompanies one’s position; it is education that creates the ‘nature’ suited to a particular position. Unequal capacity, in other words, is created by education. As Rancière writes,

[I]t is selection that determines nature. The difference in nature is not the irrational that thought runs up against, nor is it the ‘ideology’ where the history of social oppression conceals itself. Nothing in fact is concealed. Plato says openly that nature must be an object of decree in order to become an object of education. It is the presupposition laid down by the selector-breeder of souls to begin the work of forming natures. (18)

⁹² Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 4.

⁹³ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 18.

⁹⁴ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 29.

What Rancière wants to highlight, therefore, is that neither the necessity of the division of labour, nor differences in natural capacities, seem to be the real reason Plato insists on everyone keeping to their proper place. Many could have time for more than one job, and many are naturally capable of more than what their job demands. The reasons he offers are simply justifications one might give to those not equipped to appreciate the real reason for the injunction: the protection of free-thinking.

Indeed, Rancière notes that Plato's main aim is "to preserve the radical purity of philosophy from all forms of corruption and counterfeit".⁹⁵ As such, the "Philosopher's City has only one real enemy, a character held in low regard: the parvenu", the imitator who does not know his place, whether a popular Sophist, a cobbler who wants to weigh in on the running of the city, or a warrior who wants to pen poetry.⁹⁶ What is threatening about the figure of the parvenu, Rancière argues, is not that he is an imitator or even a liar. For, as Rancière underscores, the philosopher also engages in lying, as is exemplified by the myth of the metals. The philosopher is not a straightforward "lover of the true".⁹⁷ Rather, Plato wants to preserve the art of distinguishing between truth and lying, the art of dealing with "appearances", for the philosopher.⁹⁸ What Rancière's analysis tries to show is that Plato admits to the power and importance of "divine delirium"—and thus the slippages and gaps that exist between words and things—but that what he fears is that others will exploit this delirium for the wrong purposes.⁹⁹ This is the fear that fuels the need to keep everyone in their proper place, the fear that preoccupations with the useful, money-making, power, vanity, etc. will be confused with

⁹⁵ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 30.

⁹⁶ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 30.

⁹⁷ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 51.

⁹⁸ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 45.

⁹⁹ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 45.

the higher arts of philosophy and poetry, and thereby debase them. It is only these higher arts, and those that practice them properly, that should be able to play with the knot between truth and lying, or reality and appearances. Imitation, ambiguity, poetry, appearances, etc. must be reserved for the select few.

However, it is not simply that Plato fears the corruption of wealth, power, or the demands of everyday life on the higher arts, he also fears the disorder that would be unleashed if anyone at all had access to ‘appearances’. Philosophy and poetry might get exploited by such a diverse number of ‘parvenus’ that truth and lying become so mixed up that no one can distinguish them anymore. True free-thinking would no longer be easily distinguishable from sophistry. It is the threat of this disorder that worries Plato most, according to Rancière; and, moreover, it is this threat of disorder that he associates with democracy. As Rancière explains in most detail in *Hatred of Democracy*, for Plato democracy “is a style of life that is opposed to any well-ordered government of community” and,

It is properly the regime that overturns all relations that structure human society: its governors have the demeanour of the governed and the governed the demeanour of governors; women are the equals of men; fathers accustom themselves to treating their sons as equals; the foreigner and the immigrants are equal citizens; the schoolmaster fears and flatters the pupils who, in turn, make fun of him; the young are the equals of the old and the old imitate the young; even the beasts are free and the horses and asses, conscious of their liberty and dignity, knock over anyone who does not yield to them in the street.¹⁰⁰

Democracy is what turns natural social relations upside down and confuses what should be neatly ordered. It disjoins any “entitlements to govern from any analogy to those [natural authorities] that order social relations, from any analogy between human convention and the order of nature”.¹⁰¹ It is a reign of excess and limitless desires that

¹⁰⁰ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 36.

¹⁰¹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 41.

“corrupts us all”.¹⁰² Therefore, if the main aim is to foster and protect the purity of Philosophy through a careful ordering of society, then clearly the taming of democratic impulses must be a priority.

According to Rancière’s analysis, education is the means through which Plato hopes to tame the disordering effects of democracy. Indeed, for Plato, education and social hierarchy are turned to for the same purpose. Education is what *creates* social hierarchy—it selects and shapes people for their lot. It *creates* natural dispositions suited to a particular social function. It is what institutes the social hierarchy whose purpose is to both select and train those capable of free thinking and ensure that those who have not been properly trained do not exercise their capacity for thinking out of turn. It is what establishes the divide between those who are capable of free-thinking and those who are not. Education and social hierarchy are thus the twin solutions to Plato’s problem of the disordering consequences of democracy: they create a social order where people are trained for a particular place, and kept in this particular place, so as not to threaten the practice of free thinking by those designated to do it.

To return to Rancière’s critiques of the debates about schooling in France, it is clear that he sees exhibited in both the republican and the sociological positions this same desire to create a social order where everyone has a proper place and to use education to establish this order. Rancière’s critique is obviously particularly provocative in the French context; however, it is also interesting for those of us outside this context for a number of reasons. First, Rancière’s analysis identifies a common tendency to treat education as an instrument of social harmonization, or, even more generally, as a

¹⁰² Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 9.

‘solution’ to the ills of society: under the sway of the pernicious authority of the elite, or a destructive popular authority of the day, society is falling apart and education can be mobilized to help rebuild and create a better tomorrow. Education is the salve that will help us establish or restore our freedoms. It is the way we can set society straight without having to engage in any political debate or conflict. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this tendency to promote education as the solution to societal problems is extremely common and shared by those of extremely different political perspectives. Rancière’s critique draws our attention to this tendency and asks us to consider its authoritarian implications. As such, it provides an interesting starting point to critique many contemporary political approaches to education.

Having said this, however, Rancière also underscores that it would be a mistake to interpret Plato’s turn to education as stemming from some kind of totalitarian impulse. He claims: “Too much emphasis has been placed on this desire [to order the city through education] as the dream of the ‘totalitarian’ philosopher”.¹⁰³ Or again,

Philosophy [as imagined and initiated by Plato] is fundamentally genealogy, a discourse on nature as a discourse on nobility. It should not be understood as a ‘proslavery’ discourse designed to justify an inegalitarian social order or to shut men up in the ‘totalitarianism’ of its idea. Its concern is less to lock others up than to protect itself from them, less to impose truth than to safeguard its appearance.¹⁰⁴

If Rancière’s analysis highlights Plato’s turn to education as an authoritarian solution to the threat of the disorders of democracy, he nonetheless wants to ensure that his analysis is not lumped together with those that portray Plato as a totalitarian. Plato is not some totalitarian bogeyman to be held up in contrast to the glories of liberalism. Rather, what

¹⁰³ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 52.

interests Rancière is that Plato's pursuit of a true communist community¹⁰⁵ and the freedom of thought it would foster is made possible by an intensive process of selection, ordering, moulding and dyeing. In other words, for Plato, freedom and equality are to be achieved through an aristocratic and authoritarian education. What this signals is that the turn to education is not motivated by a desire to control and oppress, but a desire to institute and protect freedom and equality. Democratic unruliness must be controlled in order that a community of equals capable of thinking freely can be achieved. It is the freedom that is particular to democracy that must be kept in check, not all forms of freedom.

It is this combination of egalitarian and liberatory aims with antidemocratic means that particularly interests Rancière. And again for our purposes it is doubly interesting because this antidemocratic means is education. In fact, in this Platonic schema it is clear that education is fundamentally aristocratic and sits opposed to democracy. I would argue that this schema that opposes the sphere of democracy to the aristocratic sphere of education remains in place in many approaches to education, even when the aristocratic nature of education may be denied or assumed to be perfectly compatible with democracy. For example, if we return to Weber's essay, he writes:

After extensive experience and sober reflection on the subject, I have developed a profound distrust of lecture courses that attract large numbers, unavoidable though they may be. Democracy is all very well in its rightful place. In contrast, academic training of the kind we are supposed to provide in keeping with the German university tradition is a matter of *aristocratic spirit*, and we must be under no illusions about this.¹⁰⁶

Less obviously, consider the commonplace in political science that the purpose of education is to provide people with the knowledge, values and skills required to be a

¹⁰⁵ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Weber, "Science as a Vocation", 6.

democratic citizen. In this case, a distinction is assumed between the sphere of education and the sphere of democracy. Moreover, education is assumed to be the progressive and hierarchical order of training that will equip a person for the freedom of democracy. Although this education is *for* democracy, it is clear that it is itself aristocratic rather than democratic.

Why this opposition between education and democracy is of interest, however, is not simply because it suggests that education is an aristocratic sphere, but because ‘free-thinking’ is usually associated with this aristocratic sphere. Indeed, even if democracy is the sphere of ‘freedom’, it is most often assumed that it is in education that one learns to ‘think’ critically, independently, or ‘freely’. Thus, Rancière’s critique demands that we ask: what are the consequences of linking ‘free thinking’—and its connection to all that is true, good and just—with the aristocratic spirit of education? Moreover, I would argue that Rancière’s critique demands that we ask this question not only of those who stress education’s aristocratic spirit, but also of those who simply associate free-thinking with the sphere of education. After all, why should education be thought to be the proper sphere for free thinking, if it were not for the fact that education was associated with truth and knowledge *unlike* the sphere of politics? Indeed, as we shall explore in more detail in the second part of this chapter, insofar as ‘free-thinking’ is associated with education because of its relationship to truth and knowledge, Plato’s schema remains firmly in place: free thinking comes to life amid the aristocratic spirit of education and it is opposed to whatever freedom may take place in democracy.

However, perhaps the most provocative aspect of Rancière’s critique of the debate about schools in France is his insistence that contemporary sociological critiques share in

this Platonic lineage. It is provocative because most of those inspired by this sociological tradition would see themselves as against the elitism and inequality of this Platonic lineage, and because this sociological tradition is extremely influential not only in France, but here in North America. For example, one of the most widely accepted truths about education today in North America—as communicated by teachers, popular films and TV shows about education¹⁰⁷, educational policy¹⁰⁸, etc.—is the idea that if a teacher really wants to reach his students he should find out what his students are interested in and tailor his lessons to their interests. Good teachers engage marginalized students in particular by adapting lessons to what concerns students and what they already know: if a student is involved in selling drugs in the ghetto, math lessons and history lessons should be taught through ‘street’ scenarios. Good teachers fit the curriculum, and perhaps even school institutions, to the way of life of the students. This is just good-teaching-common-sense. Whether or not these strategies are effective, this accepted truth clearly stems from the sociological position outlined by Rancière. There is a widespread belief among educators that we must discover what really matters to students so that our educational program can be adapted to them, and so, in turn, they will no longer be marginalized in society. They too ought to belong to the community, and it is education that can help achieve this social and political aim.

What Rancière’s analysis helps us see is that these ideas inspired by the sociological tradition perpetuate the authoritarian strategy of ordering that is at the heart of the Platonic schema. In two senses: first, in the way that education is turned to as the

¹⁰⁷ See, for instance, *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *The Wire* (2002-2008), etc.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Ontario Ministry of Education, *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom* (2005), last Modified December 5, 2013, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/manyroots/>, 17.

non-political means through which to overcome the breach that exists between students and the community—an educational program is designed by experts and knowing teachers that will bring marginalized students into the fold. Second, in the way that such an education can maintain a student's place of inferiority despite its intentions to break down hierarchical barriers. Indeed, if the aim is to adapt all lessons to a student's way of life, the way of life of a student can become reinforced. Even what you learn in school are lessons of the ghetto, there is no escape from ghetto-life. You are always the ghetto kid, but now you are the ghetto kid who is recognized as such by your school. In fact, the desire to organize lessons and schools according to certain 'ways of life' can strengthen the categorizations of 'ways of life' rather than a students' ability to become something other than a ghetto kid. Thus, the sociological position can unwittingly reproduce the Platonic formula: use education as an instrument to harmonize people with institutions, while at the same time ensuring that everyone remains in their proper place.

To be sure, as was mentioned above, not all sociological thinkers in this tradition—such as Pierre Bourdieu himself—think educational institutions can easily be adapted to the lives of marginalized students.¹⁰⁹ Unlike many who were influenced by him, Bourdieu is not convinced that education can be easily reformed. Nevertheless, Rancière argues that Bourdieu's analysis still ensures that Plato's injunction that people remain in their proper place is in force. It does this insofar as it argues that the marginalized are excluded and oppressed by educational institutions by the very fact that they cannot see nor understand their own exclusion:

School makes the children of the common people believe that it welcomes them and their others with equal opportunities, that success and failure depend on personal *gifts* independent of social

¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, ix.

conditions. This dissimulation is simulated in the games of cultural charisma in which the teacher pretends to exercise his students in an aesthetic vision transcending the routine of school exercise. He thus obliges them to expatiate on ‘the *je ne sais quoi* and litanies of classical passion or the infinite, infinitesimal nuances of good taste.’ In doing so, of course he attributes the charisma of gifts to those for whom culture has an existence beyond the walls of the school: those who own it by birthright and who are able to bring to the perception of the *je ne sais quoi* the ease that characterizes their manners or their clothing.¹¹⁰

Or again,

School eliminates by making people believe that it does not eliminate, by obliging those for whom school has not been created to eliminate themselves spontaneously—to judge by themselves that they are not gifted since they are unable to profit from the course of studies offered to them.¹¹¹

This “trick” of eliminating by appearing not to eliminate unfortunately means that those who are marginalized will never be able to see or understand their own marginalization, and, in turn, their inability to recognize how they are marginalized will keep them in their marginal place. Accordingly for Bourdieu, progressives who attempt to reform education to offer programs that will target the marginalized can actually heighten marginalization: they proclaim the establishment of an open, empowering education, while inevitably relying in this reformed education on a progressive ethos that will also exclude the marginalized. A liberating pedagogy for the masses is thus impossible.¹¹² To be sure, there is a *science* of how marginalization or “dispossession” operates, but those who would benefit from this science—the marginalized—have no access to it. Moreover, those who do have the means to appropriate this science have no wish to do so—they are the elite who benefit from the operations of dispossession.¹¹³ (Except, as Rancière points out, many elite do appropriate this science...)¹¹⁴ In other words, there remains a glimmer of hope for education—the science of marginalization can be learnt—but this science cannot be accessed by the marginalized. Therefore, again, we find that the marginalized

¹¹⁰ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 173.

¹¹¹ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 171-172.

¹¹² Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 180.

¹¹³ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 180-181.

¹¹⁴ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 181.

are kept in their place, even if this place-keeping is not desired by Bourdieu in any straightforward way.

Thus, Rancière's critique of the debates about schooling in France not only alerts us to the widespread tendency to turn to education as an authoritarian means, it also offers a more specific critique of the sociological tradition's approach to problems of education. This critique is especially devastating for those who borrow from this sociological tradition in the spirit of radical change. In the North American context, as we shall see in Chapter 3, most radical analyses of education borrow from this tradition. Therefore, Rancière's analysis presents a line of critique that is extremely relevant, and troubling, for this radical tradition inspired by sociological analyses of education. More generally, however, Rancière's analysis draws our attention to how a Platonic schema frames and animates our thinking about education.

Education, Knowledge and Emancipation:

In fact, it is Rancière's engagement with Plato that forms the common link between his critique of the debate about schools in France and his critique of our common understanding of emancipation. For, as Rancière writes in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, Plato establishes a "certain connection between the question of freedom and the question of knowledge" which is at the heart of our understanding of emancipation to this day.¹¹⁵ For example, consider Plato's evocative description of the dazzling experience of the cave dweller forced into the light. This analogy that Plato develops in Book VII of the

¹¹⁵ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 38.

Republic is not only famous, but the imagery he uses in this analogy also continues to colour our understanding of emancipation. In the emancipatory moment, for instance, true knowledge brings sight to the blind, removes us from the shadows and into the light, turns us away from base preoccupations, awakes us from a dream, releases us from the bonds of slavery, etc. True knowledge produces a kind of divine revolution; it *frees* a person in the most profound way. It is also clearly this connection between true knowledge and freedom that forms the basis of the problematic Plato institutes between an oppressive social authority and an education that can free. For the reason that education can free, is that it is what gives a person access to knowledge. Education is emancipatory because it is what leads to ‘free’ thinking, the thinking that follows from apprehending the truth.

This is not simply a problem because determining ‘truth’ is a difficult if not suspect exercise, but it is also a problem because of the education this seems to require. For, what seems to be required to achieve true knowledge is the ascendancy of philosophy and the philosopher. The path to true knowledge cannot be guaranteed simply through a rigorous education for a select few in calculation, geometry, astronomy, harmonies and the dialectic. The education of individual philosophers must be supplemented with a more comprehensive educational arrangement whose purpose is to create a new system of authority that prioritizes philosophy. In fact, although Rancière gestures towards his critique of our common understanding of emancipation in various places in his writing, it is his analysis of Plato’s schema in *The Philosopher and his Poor* that most clearly lays out why this connection between true knowledge and freedom is a problem. For, according to his analysis, true knowledge not only requires a new authority

that ensures the pre-eminence of philosophy, but this new authority also introduces fundamental hierarchies in all aspects of education: the institutional structure, the ways of knowing and thinking, the teaching relationship, and the form of argumentation that is taught.

As we have already seen, for example, to educate the few properly in philosophy requires an institutional arrangement that bars the majority from philosophy or the high arts, even though they do in fact have the natural capacity for them. A hierarchical division of labour is created by education in order that those who do end up practicing philosophy can be free from the corruptions of everyday activity. Those who are trained for everyday trades and labours must be kept in their place by an authority that respects philosophy and propagates a myth about different natures. The inequality created through this educational arrangement is necessary in order to guarantee that a few will have access to true knowledge. However, inequality is not only produced through an institutional arrangement that selects and trains people for fixed roles in the community, it is also produced by introducing a hierarchy of ways of knowing and thinking.

Education towards true knowledge must create a hierarchical division of ways of knowing and thinking so that those who are seeking true knowledge will not be polluted by the concerns and interests which infiltrate the ways of knowing and thinking that belong to the everyday. In particular, the way of knowing and thinking that belong to philosophy must be clearly separated from “technological imitation”.¹¹⁶ For technological imitation is a kind of thinking that is either ignorant of its own ends¹¹⁷ or, worse,

¹¹⁶ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 30.

¹¹⁷ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 16.

motivated by ends that are servile to the everyday: money-making, pleasure, pride, etc.¹¹⁸ This is what Plato claims makes certain poets, and all sophists, so dangerous: they apply a technological way of thinking to philosophical subject matters and thereby corrupt philosophy.¹¹⁹ Philosophy is the form of thinking concerned with ‘ends’ and ‘truth’, which does not blindly imitate but rationally *understands*.¹²⁰ However, Rancière suggests that Plato’s argument is duplicitous: philosophy is not to technological thinking as rational understanding is to imitation, or truth is to the lie/falsehood; rather philosophy is also involved in imitation and lying. Its way of knowing and thinking is not distinguishable from the technological thought in form. However, “the philosopher must separate the kind of imitation and lie specific to him from all artisanal productions”¹²¹ so as to reserve “room for the royal science of the idea of the good”.¹²² What actually separates philosophical thought from technological thought is the division of labour and the injunction to mind one’s own business, and this division of labour and injunction, as we know, are things created by education. Therefore, the hierarchical division of ways of knowing and thinking is a more subtle extension of the new authority that must be in place for true knowledge to be acquired by a few. Not only must educational institutions work to select and train people for their role in the community, but a belief must be created in the superiority and uniqueness of the way of thinking and knowing that belongs to philosophy and the philosopher.

We can see, then, that the inequality introduced through the creation of a hierarchical division of ways of knowing and thinking runs deep. The belief in a

¹¹⁸ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 20.

¹¹⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, 272.

¹²⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, 185.

¹²¹ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 30.

¹²² Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 27.

hierarchical division of ways of knowing and thinking helps to support a strict division of labour, but can also outlast any particular institutional or societal arrangement.

Philosophers possess a way of knowing and thinking that is inaccessible and unimaginable for the many. As Socrates warns Glaucon in the *Republic* during their discussion of the “song of the dialectic”: “You won’t be able to follow me any longer, Glaucon, even though there is no lack of eagerness on my part to lead you, for you would no longer be seeing an image of what we’re describing, but the truth itself”.¹²³ But not only is true knowledge unavailable to Glaucon, but the dialectic itself. This exclusion, it would seem, is the most formidable as it tries to prevent people from thinking, or more precisely, in believing that they could possibly be thinking philosophically. Indeed, if one believes that one’s own thinking capacity is unavoidably lame, what is the point in trying to think at all? Why not leave thinking to the philosophers?

Second, beyond Plato’s arguments for the establishment of a new authority that establishes complementary hierarchical orders of a division of labour and a division of ways of knowing and thinking, the dialogues between Socrates and his interlocutors also present a form of educational relationship that secures the mastery of the philosopher. Socrates’ discussions with his interlocutors reveal him to be the ultimate authority. He always demonstrates that his interlocutors are somehow muddled and confused in their own opinions, even if they are intelligent enough to follow his own arguments with ease. And, despite his claims of ignorance, one is always left with the impression that Socrates knows a good deal: he certainly seems to know precisely what sort of knowledge he is

¹²³ Plato, *Republic*, 204.

after¹²⁴ and he also seems to possess more of this knowledge than he lets on. To return to our example above, as his comment to Glaucon indicates, Socrates suggests that he in fact has seen “the truth itself” and most certainly knows the “song of the dialectic” which leads one to it.¹²⁵ Socrates may be wise to the limits of his knowledge, but he is not the humble, ignorant man that he often pretends to be. His claim of ignorance is also a useful ploy that cuts his interlocutors down to size, while underscoring his own superior wisdom.

Moreover, what Rancière’s analysis highlights is that any learning Socrates’s interlocutors demonstrate in the course of a dialogue is most often entirely dependent on Socrates himself.¹²⁶ Learning is not the result of individual effort or brilliance, nor is it the result of a shared exercise of inquiry. Rather the pattern is most often the following: the interlocutor’s first pretensions of knowledge are shown by Socrates to be baseless, and then through a back and forth of questions and answers Socrates either puts forth a more stable proposition, or draws one out of the interlocutor. In either case, the interlocutor learns something he could never arrive at on his own. His learning is entirely dependent on the intellectual prowess of Socrates. The most extreme example of this is Socrates’ dialogue with Meno’s slave-boy. As Rancière points out, Meno’s slave-boy is the figure of “pure” ignorance, the “absolute dispossessed”.¹²⁷ Yet Socrates’s “torpedo of dialectical provocation” awakens the slave-boy to his knowledge, or more precisely true

¹²⁴ For example: “Socrates: ‘Indeed, I too speak as one who does not have knowledge but is guessing. However, I certainly do not think I am guessing that right opinion is a different thing than knowledge. If I claim to know anything else—and I would make a claim about few things—I would put this down as one of the things I know.’” Plato, *Meno*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976), 30.

¹²⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, 204.

¹²⁶ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 37.

¹²⁷ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 38.

opinions, of geometry.¹²⁸ It would have been impossible for the slave-boy to have discovered his opinions on geometry without Socrates; and, indeed, after Socrates is done with him the boy's opinions are inevitably going to slip back into the confused darkness of his ignorance. As Socrates puts it, the slave-boy's "opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream".¹²⁹ Thus, it is clear that even though Socrates argues that knowledge lies buried within the boy, as it does with everyone, access to this knowledge is only through the philosopher. It is only the philosopher who enlightens, or who allows a person to continue fumbling in the dark.

In fact, the teaching that has the ability to awaken knowledge is distinguished from other forms of teaching and the mystery of its ways guarded carefully. The "torpedo of dialectical provocation" is not something that any teacher can imitate. Indeed, as Rancière underscores, one of Plato's main aims in the *Meno* is to show that there "is nothing the popular philosophers could transmit to the artisans"; the artisans, as well as other citizens, must be made to realize "that all their efforts [to learn] can only take them away from the knowledge that sleeps within them".¹³⁰ For, as one can see in the *Meno*, there are two different definitions of teaching or education in operation, even though Socrates never openly discusses these different definitions. On the one hand, there is education that involves "explaining things" and is done by those who are experts in their craft and "who exact fees...from anyone who wishes to come to them and learn".¹³¹ Those who practice this sort of explanation-teaching are the physicians, the shoemakers

¹²⁸ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 37.

¹²⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 19.

¹³⁰ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 37 and 38.

¹³¹ Plato, *Meno*, 23.

and the sophists.¹³² On the other hand, there is education that instigates “recollection” and, as we know already, is done by the philosopher.¹³³ This special form of education does not involve explanation or transmission of knowledge but “conversion”.¹³⁴ As Socrates explains in more detail in the *Republic*:

Education [as practiced by the philosopher] isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes. [...] the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good. [...] Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it.¹³⁵

The education practiced by the philosopher is cloaked in the mystery of this exercise of “turning”. It is certainly has no resemblance to the form of direct apprenticeship practiced by shoemakers or sophists.

Furthermore, it is clear that Socrates not only distinguishes, elevates and makes inaccessible the education practiced by the philosopher, but the demands of this education itself are amazingly high. Socrates is careful to point out, for instance, that the slave-boy certainly did not possess *knowledge* from his interaction with him; this would have taken much more work. Moreover, as is detailed in great length in Book VII of the *Republic*, the education that would lead to knowledge is extremely long and arduous; and, as if this were not enough, until this education is complete, as the above quote states, the student will remain blind in the darkness. There is no knowledge without a complete “turning”. One has either experienced philosophical conversion, or one is ignorant: there is no partial wisdom, no wisdom in some matters and not others. It is clear, then, that

¹³² Plato, *Meno*, 23.

¹³³ Plato, *Meno*, 14.

¹³⁴ Ranci re, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 38.

¹³⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 190.

Plato blocks all avenues to true knowledge, except for the lucky few. And, even for the lucky few, one wonders about the ability of anyone, other than Socrates, to complete this demanding educational conversion. It would seem that the philosopher is likely alone in his ability to think and know, all others floundering in the dark with no way to escape except through his own generosity. Therefore, we can see that the teaching relationship that Socrates has with his interlocutors is primarily concerned with confirming his own wisdom and the authority of philosophy. “Freeing” his interlocutors from their ignorance is a promise always held up as a possibility, but never realized. What is realized, however, is the communication of appropriate opinion of, and respect for, philosophy and the philosopher. It seems that it is the institution of this new philosophical authority that concerns Plato the most; and it is education—in the form of the educational arrangement that Plato advocates, as well as in the form of the education that Socrates’ practices—which is the means for this institution. Education is the activity which can provide access to the truth and knowledge that frees, but even more importantly it is the activity which establishes the authority of the philosopher.

Finally, following from this last point, one of the lessons that Socrates transmits to his interlocutors is a method of analyzing the world that places the philosopher in the position of interpreter of appearances. If a discrepancy exists between order and life, words and things, reason and nature, then it is the philosopher who should have the sole authority to interpret this failure to ‘line up’. As was noted earlier, it is the philosopher who is to be guardian of appearances, the regulator of “simulacrum”.¹³⁶ However, the philosopher is not only to be granted the sole interpretive authority, Rancière argues that

¹³⁶ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 17.

his interpretation of these discrepancies establishes a discourse of reality and illusion.¹³⁷ We see, for example, this dichotomy of reality and illusion in Socrates' speeches on the juxtaposition between being and the world of becoming, the juxtaposition between the understanding of the philosopher and the misunderstandings of the ignorant cave-dweller, and the juxtaposition between good order and all the corruptions of democracy. In other words, the interpretation of the discrepancy between words and things as one between reality and illusion condemns together on the side of 'illusion' the-world-in-process, the views and opinions of the many, and democracy. All these are perversions of the true order of 'reality'. If there is anything short-lived, imperfect, unstable, divided or contradictory, it is an illusion. As Rancière writes, all "division [is interpreted] as non-truth—lie or illusion".¹³⁸

This splitting of the world into reality and illusion initiates, according to Rancière, a "will, inherited from Plato, to reduce" all discrepancy and division.¹³⁹ As we saw with his critique of schools, this desire to suppress discrepancy and division extends far beyond Ancient Greece and sustains some disturbing trends, including not only authoritarian approaches to education but also, according to Rancière, a hatred of democracy.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the discourse of reality and illusion furthers the agenda of ensuring the ascendancy of philosophy and the philosopher by associating all popular views and opinions, and democracy itself, with illusion and lies.¹⁴¹ As Rancière claims, "the first battle of 'political philosophy' with democracy was Plato's polemic against the doxa, that

¹³⁷ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 58.

¹³⁸ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 44.

¹³⁹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 58.

¹⁴⁰ See *Hatred of Democracy*.

¹⁴¹ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 43.

is the assimilation of the visible peculiar to the demos with the regime of untruth”.¹⁴² Ever since democracy has “found itself dogged” by this association with illusion and lies.¹⁴³ And, this condemnation of democracy is essential if the authority of philosophy and the philosopher is to be established: the varied and contradictory opinions of the many must be revealed as illusory in order that the freedom particular to democracy is not sought. What must be sought instead is the freedom that results from true knowledge, which only a philosophical “turning” can bring.

We can see, then, that Plato’s seemingly innocuous association between freedom and knowledge necessitates a privileging of the authority of philosophy and the philosopher that is deeply troubling. What follows from Plato’s association between freedom and knowledge are a series of hierarchies: a hierarchical division of labour, a hierarchy of ways of knowing and thinking, a hierarchical division between different forms of education, a hierarchical theoretical dichotomy between ‘reality’ and ‘illusion’, and even a hierarchy between two different kinds of freedom. Indeed, Plato not only associates true freedom with an aristocratic, educational order that privileges philosophy and the philosopher, but he opposes this freedom to the freedom of democracy. There is the freedom of ‘thought’ that is connected to truth and justice, and then there is the freedom of ‘democracy’ that is connected to illusions, lies, perversions and oppressions. Rancière’s critique thus highlights this fundamental distinction in Plato’s schema between two kinds of freedom. His critique pushes us to ask: are there two kinds of freedom? Why do we privilege the freedom that is associated with the aristocratic sphere of education?

¹⁴² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 99.

¹⁴³ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 44.

This is a similar question to the one that inspires Arendt in many of her essays in *Between Past and Future*. Like Rancière, Arendt is troubled by our tradition of privileging the ‘freedom’ that is associated with thought and the ‘inner’ realm. In fact, she argues that “the philosophic tradition [...] has distorted, instead of clarifying, the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience by transposing it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain”.¹⁴⁴ However, at least in her essay “What is Freedom?”, she is less concerned than Rancière with the elitism and anti-democratic spirit implicit in this privileging of the freedom that belongs to the inner realm. Rather, what concerns Arendt is that it encourages a withdrawal from worldly affairs and it equates freedom with an absolutely sovereign, or ‘free’, will. The inner freedom of the will is apolitical, and the pursuit of this freedom is potentially dangerous in its desire for sovereignty and control.¹⁴⁵ Arendt traces this privileging of inner freedom to our Christian influences, and highlights its centrality in liberal thought.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, Plato’s influence on this tradition is not emphasized, despite noting in a few places his dismissal of the freedom that manifests itself in politics and his glorification of the *vita contemplativa*.¹⁴⁷ It is likely that Plato’s influence is not of interest for Arendt here, because she is primarily concerned with our tradition’s association of inner freedom with the sovereign will, rather than its tendency of reserving the experience of ‘true’ freedom for a select few. Indeed, her primary aim is to pose this tradition of conceptualizing freedom as the individual freedom of the will against a tradition of actual Greek and Roman practice that understood freedom to be a condition

¹⁴⁴ Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, 144.

¹⁴⁵ Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, 145 and 162-3.

¹⁴⁶ Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, 154 and 163.

¹⁴⁷ Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, 145, 149, and 155.

and experience of politics.¹⁴⁸ Thus, Arendt's interest in our history of prioritizing inner freedom is motivated by a desire to draw our attention to the experience of freedom particular to politics.

Rancière writings on politics could be seen to share this same desire, however, his critiques of Plato's privileging of the inner freedom are motivated instead by a desire to highlight the barriers constructed by the philosopher to prevent ordinary people from thinking or believing that they can think. In other words, what concerns Rancière is the construction of the divide between those who can think and are therefore free, and those who cannot and are therefore enchained.¹⁴⁹ The privileging of inner freedom is concerning because it seems to shut out a certain category of people from thought and its freedom. Therefore, for Rancière, what is troubling is the very divide, the very distinction made between two types of freedom: is the freedom of thought really so different than the freedom of politics? What is interesting, then, is that despite Arendt's desire to open us up to the possibility of a vital experience of the freedom of politics, she nonetheless is loathe to abandon Plato's distinction between the two kinds of freedom found in the opposing spheres of education and politics. In fact, she wants to elevate the freedom of politics, while at the same time reinforcing Plato's separation between different ways of life: on the one hand there is the life of the mind—a life associated with success in an aristocratic education, and on the other there is the life of politics and action.¹⁵⁰ Insofar as this divide is maintained in her writings, and insofar as the life of the mind is expressly linked by Arendt to our tradition of philosophers, the barrier that Rancière's critiques

¹⁴⁸ Arendt, "What is Freedom?", 153.

¹⁴⁹ Rancière, "The Method of Jacques Rancière", 116.

¹⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 17.

highlight between the philosopher and the masses remains firmly in place. The thought and freedom that is particular to the life of the mind is out of the reach of ordinary people. Moreover, what distinguishes the life of the mind for Arendt is not only its inward character, but its pursuit of eternal truths rather than glory or immortality.¹⁵¹ Thus, Plato's essential distinctions remain: there is the freedom that is associated with truth and the life of the philosopher on the one hand, and there is the freedom that is associated with opinion and the life of democratic politics on the other.

However, there is an ambiguity in Arendt's writing: although she maintains the idea of separate ways of life, and although it is only a few select philosophers who experience the life of the mind, she nonetheless suggests in a few places that *thought*, as distinct from contemplation or knowledge, does not necessarily belong singularly to the life of the mind.¹⁵² In fact, unlike contemplation or knowledge, which are unavoidably connected to the authority of truth for Arendt, thought belongs to "every sane person no matter how erudite or ignorant, how intelligent or stupid he may prove to be".¹⁵³ Moreover, the value of thought, like politics, does not derive from its end, but its own performance, its own activity.¹⁵⁴ Thus, for Arendt, there are important parallels between the activity of thought and the activity of politics: they are human activities, unconnected to the pursuit of truth, valuable in themselves, which belong to everyone. Obviously, then, she does try to open up the activity of thinking to all; and yet, she nonetheless continues to insist on various hierarchical distinctions inherited from Plato and even takes

¹⁵¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 20.

¹⁵² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 16; and Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," *Social Research* Vol. 38, No. 3 (1971), 422.

¹⁵³ Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", 422.

¹⁵⁴ Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", 426.

Socrates to be the exemplar of the thinking man.¹⁵⁵ The particular freedom of thinking may be open to all, but the freedom connected to knowledge and truth is not. And, despite their capacity for thought, the masses are still characterized by their practicality, their lack of time for thought, and their anti-intellectual spirit:

The ‘everybody’ of whom we demand thinking writes no books; he has more urgent business to attend to. And the few, who Kant once called the ‘professional thinkers’, were never particularly eager to write about the experience itself, perhaps because they knew that thinking was resultless by nature. For their books with their doctrines were inevitably composed with an eye to the many, who wish to see results and don’t care to draw distinctions between knowing and thinking, between truth and meaning”.¹⁵⁶

Thus, despite brushing up against a more democratic understanding of the relationships between thought-freedom-politics, Arendt nonetheless maintains the Platonic prejudices that glorify the philosopher and shut the many up in their world of practical obligations. In contrast, Rancière’s critique pushes us to question the very distinction between the freedom of thought that belongs to the philosopher and the freedom that belongs to democracy, because it is this distinction which carries within it a tradition of shutting the masses out from thought, subjugating democracy to elite experts, and connecting the promise of emancipation with an aristocratic educational order seeking truth.

Indeed, Rancière’s analysis asks us to consider the broad educational, social and political implications of Plato’s understanding emancipation. Of course, Rancière’s analysis of Plato is important because he argues this schema and its implications are still in effect today. We can see a Platonic schema at work within Arendt’s writings, within Weber’s writings, in the common distinction made between the spheres of education and politics, in the tendency to turn to education as an authoritarian means, and in the desire,

¹⁵⁵ Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations”, 428.

¹⁵⁶ Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations”, 426.

whether conscious or not, to keep everyone in their proper place. However, Rancière also draws particular attention to how this schema operates within the radical tradition—not only the sociological tradition, but a broader tradition that furthers Plato’s understanding of emancipation. More specifically, Rancière shows how Plato’s schema animates modern discourses on ideology.

Ideology:

As we noted earlier, Rancière argues that the modern social sciences in general inherit from Plato “an attitude of suspicion, of *looking underneath*”.¹⁵⁷ According to Rancière, this attitude is developed into a mode of analysis which assumes that things are never really what they seem: the intellectual must look below the surface for the truth of the matter, and it is only the intellectual’s method or science that will allow him to distinguish truth from appearances. This fairly straightforward Platonic schema of an intellectual who alone has the ability to distinguish between reality and illusion is transformed and intensified, however, by the radical social scientific tradition. Rancière explores this intensification particularly in relation to the writings of Althusser and Bourdieu, and to a lesser extent in the writings of Marx and Sartre.¹⁵⁸ He argues that these thinkers create a science for understanding illusion itself. In other words, illusion is no longer simply decried as false, but the falseness of illusion must also be explained and the explanation of this falseness becomes the truth science aims at uncovering. Rancière

¹⁵⁷ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 44.

¹⁵⁸ See for instance Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson* and *The Philosopher and His Poor*.

claims, “Marx in his genius invented a key word that all modernity has adopted [for this truth of falseness...] He called it ideology”.¹⁵⁹

Thus, a new science of ideology is born which adds yet another dimension to reflections on education. This new science not only decries the “gap between words and things”, but sets out to explain this gap and why it is inevitably misunderstood.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, as in Plato’s schema, the masses will inevitably misunderstand. However, in this modern mutation it is not only that the masses will fail to distinguish reality from illusion, but they will also be unable to understand why they are deluded in the first place. In other words, they will be unable to understand how their own illusions are produced. As Rancière explains,

According to the traditional view of ‘ideology’, people are exploited and oppressed because they don’t know the law of their exploitation or oppression. They have wrong representations of what they are and why they are so. And they have those wrong representations of their place because the place where they are confined hinders them from seeing the structure that allots them that place. In short, the argument on the mechanism of ideology reads: they are where they are because they don’t know why they are where they are. And they don’t know why they are where they are because they are where they are. The positive conclusion had it that they could step out of that place only if they were given a true scientific knowledge and right artistic representations of the reasons for their being there.¹⁶¹

Quite simply, the masses’ inability to understand how their own illusions are produced is a symptom of their oppression, and, in turn, it will ensure they remain oppressed unless this knowledge is revealed to them. What Rancière’s analysis of ideology highlights, therefore, is how the radical social scientific discourse enforces Plato’s injunction that everyone remain in their proper place: not only are the masses barred from knowledge and understanding because what they do makes them less suited to intellectual activity, but because what they do and where they are in the social hierarchy inevitably produces

¹⁵⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 85.

¹⁶⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 85.

¹⁶¹ Rancière, “The Method of Equality”, 275.

illusory beliefs that they cannot know to be such without the guidance of those with access to the proper knowledge. And, to make the knot even tighter, the knowledge that must be accessed in order to be able to distinguish reality from illusion is the knowledge of how ‘place’ and illusion are connected. Freedom requires being given the explanation of the production of the illusion that is the true authority that imprisons and oppresses the masses.

Rancière’s analysis illustrates how Plato’s understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the freedom of emancipation is exaggerated by the radical tradition. Emancipation now depends on the communication of the intellectual’s determination of how illusion is produced. It is this particular knowledge that has the potential to free. And of course, this reformulation of the Platonic schema requires that the aims of intellectual, political and educational energies be readjusted: What is the correct understanding of how illusion is produced? How might the masses come to understand how this illusion that oppresses is produced, and thereby become emancipated? What kind of teaching will this require? Can this knowledge be taught at all or must it be experienced in certain historical moments? Are the masses even capable of ever achieving this understanding? A more precise problem of emancipation is established, because now what knowledge is required for emancipation is clear: knowledge of the mechanisms of oppression.

One of the things that Rancière underscores about this modern version of the problem of emancipation is that it preserves the aim of securing the special position of the intellectual. In fact, there is a kind of guaranteed victory for the intellectual. According to Rancière, this victory is guaranteed thanks to a two-pronged operation: first,

the intellectual insists that the truth is hidden and only he or she can spot it, and second, the intellectual denounces those who mistake the truth for appearance or illusion. For example, commenting on Bourdieu and Passeron's analysis in *The Inheritors* and *Reproduction*, Rancière notes that Bourdieu had to show how the statistics about how the lower classes failed to stay on in school or go to University could not be explained in any straightforward manner. The statistics could not be allowed to speak for themselves¹⁶², and the explanations of both republicans and "libertarian" pedagogues had to be exposed as misguided.¹⁶³ There must be some kind of hidden truth, which no one else can see, that explains the school system's exclusion of the lower classes. However, Rancière suggests that Bourdieu desired to find this hidden truth not in economic mode of production—the domain of traditional Marxists—but in his own realm of sociology. Accordingly, he found the hidden truth in *doxa*—in the realm of belief and opinion, or more precisely, in people's unwillingness to know what they know.¹⁶⁴ So, in the case of why the lower classes fail to thrive in the school system, he found that schools eliminate by convincing people to believe that they do not eliminate. Rancière suggests that what is attractive about this explanation for Bourdieu is that the mechanisms of elimination are sufficiently hidden to the elite and masses alike. Both the elite and the masses are unwilling to admit what they at some level know to be true: schools are designed to reward the elite. Instead, both the elite and masses buy into the myth that schools are fair and equal institutions. Only the intellectual, and more particularly the young intellectual overthrowing the explanations of his forebearers, possesses the science that can reveal the truth about, and the mechanisms of the elimination that stem from this myth fairness and equality.

¹⁶² Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 169.

¹⁶³ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 171.

¹⁶⁴ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 170.

What we can see, then, is that the hiddenness of the truth bars access to knowledge for the elite and masses, while at the same time privileging the one who can access it with his science. Only the intellectual—the new figure of Plato’s philosopher—can truly understand what is going on and thus possess the truth. And, just as is the case with Socrates and the sophists he denounces, the intellectual must also show that all other intellectual pretenders are misleading people with their explanations of what is going on. Indeed, all other explanations as to why the lower classes fail to thrive in the school system must be denounced. In one way or another these explanations must be shown to further the myth of schools, and thus further oppression. So, for instance, the critiques of the authoritarianism of the school systems’ teaching relationships and methods put forward by young “apprentice philosophers” propagate the myth of fair and equal school because they call for freer teaching relationships and methods in schooling.¹⁶⁵ These freer teaching relationships and methods, however, will only entrench the pattern of rewarding those who are already equipped to succeed, but will now do so in a manner that appears free, fair and equal. By attempting to institute more liberating forms of pedagogy, the “apprentice philosophers” will only strengthen the hold of the myth of the school.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, not only are other explanations as to why lower classes fail in the school system misleading, but they actually contribute to the myth of schools that is the real source of oppression.

We see, then, the degree to which the logic of ideology privileges the position of the intellectual. Unfortunately, however, the intellectual’s position is never secure. There is always another upstart young intellectual to denounce your explanation. Indeed,

¹⁶⁵ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 174.

¹⁶⁶ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 176.

Rancière points out how the logic of suspicion or looking underneath that is a central component of the logic of ideology always involves an endless cycle of demystifications.¹⁶⁷ There is always a new, emerging intellectual on the scene to denounce his forebearers' explanations as misguided and complicit, and there is always a new veil to lift so as to reveal a hidden truth. This "indeterminate ritual of demystification" and one-upmanship highlights how the intellectual's own theory is implicated in a jockeying for the top position. The pattern of critique that the logic of ideology employs is a pattern that flatters the intellectual who mobilizes it. Thus, despite this cycle of demystification, the position of the intellectual is never threatened, only the man who claims the position. The intellectual remains in his place of privileged access to truth, and the masses remain in their place of oppression.

In addition to these concerns about the logic of ideology, Rancière is also troubled by where this logic seems to lead intellectuals like Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁶⁸ For instance, although Bourdieu was deeply committed to a more just and equal society, he nonetheless comes to the conclusion that the illusion that oppresses the lower classes is precisely their belief in their own *equality* with their betters. It is because the lower classes believe that they are equal with the elite within the school system that they become eliminated from it; it leads them to believe that their failures to achieve in school cannot be explained by anything other than their own incapacity, their own lack of talent and giftedness.¹⁶⁹ Thus, quite ironically, it is their belief in equality that is the source of their oppression. This conclusion becomes an alarm for Rancière: something must be wrong if oppression is

¹⁶⁷ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 44.

¹⁶⁸ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 53.

¹⁶⁹ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 172.

blamed on a belief in equality.¹⁷⁰ It prompts him to ask: what if it is belief in inequality, rather than equality, which is the source of oppression?

In fact, it is this question that is at the heart of his critique of ideology. Quite simply, Rancière argues that the logic of ideology is circular. Not only insofar as it traps people in their assigned place in the social hierarchy, but also insofar as it reproduces inequality. As he writes in *On the Shores of Politics*: “anyone who starts out from distrust, who assumes inequality and proposes to reduce it, can only succeed in setting up a hierarchy of inequality, a hierarchy of priorities, a hierarchy of intelligences—and will reproduce inequality ad infinitum.”¹⁷¹ The logic of ideology, for example, sets out to explain the inequality that exists between the masses and the elite. As such, it begins with an assumption that inequality exists. Its own explanations for why inequality exists will only reinforce its initial assumption about the fact of inequality. Moreover, its analyses will only ever be able to better explain why the masses are unequal. Not only are these explanations likely to require endless additions and revisions, but even if they are ready to be communicated to the masses, this communication will always work to solidify the existence of inequality. It is the masses, after all, who need their oppression explained to them. Thus, inequality is presented and reinforced at every turn.

To be clear, Rancière does not condemn the fixation on inequality as a lie or an illusion that must be overcome. In fact, according to Rancière, there are an endless number of reasons for assuming that inequality exists in the world and wanting to explain this inequality somehow.¹⁷² The point is rather to highlight the cycle of inequality that the

¹⁷⁰ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 53.

¹⁷¹ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 52.

¹⁷² Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 45.

logic of ideology sets in motion. It is here that Rancière's critique of ideology begins to veer from straightforward 'critique' towards a displacement of the Platonic schema. In fact, for the most part the critiques we have examined in this chapter do not break from the Platonic schema or the problematic of freedom and authority more generally. His critiques each aim in their own ways at exposing the workings of authority. As such, as Rancière himself admits, they take part in the logic of demystification and denunciation.¹⁷³ Rancière is lifting the veil and revealing how intellectuals strengthen their own position and authority in their discourses, and he is denouncing his intellectual forebearers for their complicity in oppressing the masses through their insistence on their own superior access to knowledge and freedom. The logic of this analysis suggests that it is only once this production of authority is understood that intellectuals and the masses alike will be able to 'free' themselves from its power. Thus, Plato's schema, at one level, remains firmly in place.

However, his critique of the circularity of the logic of ideology is also part of a move away from this schema as it is also inspired by his insight into emancipation. As I noted in the Introduction, Rancière's early investigations of nineteenth century workers writings—which were the basis for *Nights of Labor* and also led him to the writings of the pedagogue Joseph Jacotot, the figure at the centre of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*—led him to argue that what these writings demonstrated was that the 'oppressed' didn't need their oppression explained to them; it wasn't *understanding* their oppression that was emancipatory. As Rancière notes about the joiner Gabriel Gauny—a writer he explores in *Nights of Labor* who assumed the role of philosopher and poet—,

¹⁷³ Rancière, "Afterword" *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 222.

In the construction and the writing of his sensory experience, the joiner implements a different *as if* that overturns the whole logic which allotted him his place. But this overturning is far from the canonical idea of the freeing power of awareness. The jobber frees himself by becoming *less aware* of exploitation and pushing aside, thereby, its sensory grip. He frees himself by nurturing a power of self-delusion.¹⁷⁴

What is particularly important about this passage is that it highlights Rancière's explicit attempt to break from the Platonic schema for thinking emancipation. What frees Gauny is not the trajectory laid out by Plato of a liberating *turn* from the darkness of illusions towards the dazzling light of truth, or the modern trajectory of a worker being liberated by the science of the intellectual which explains to him the mechanisms of his oppression, but instead a liberating *decision* to seek and perform equality. Indeed, to be clear, Rancière is not arguing that it is 'illusions' that free as opposed to knowledge. Instead, he is attempting to trouble the very oppositions between knowledge and illusions, freedom and oppression. This is why he polemically characterizes Gabriel Gauny's decision to operate as if he was equally capable of being an artist and a philosopher as delusional. What he is trying to stress is that Gauny had not somehow accessed some hidden truth: most facts clearly point to Gauny's oppression, exploitation, and lack of time, not his equality with the intellectual elite, nor his equal capacity for leisure. Nonetheless, it is Gauny's fixation on his equal capacity as an artist and intellectual which frees him. He is emancipated because he insists on operating on an illusory belief in equality. It is thus by assuming his equality that Gabriel Gauny will create his equality and achieve some freedom.

The same insight, therefore, that forms the basis of Rancière's rethinking of emancipation is also at the heart of his critique of ideology. In both cases, he begins with the idea that one's initial assumptions are self-perpetuating. In addition to its influence on

¹⁷⁴ Rancière, "The Method of Equality", 276-277.

his critique of ideology, we may also note in retrospect this insight's influence on his critique of our common understanding of emancipation. For instance, this critique highlighted all the ways hierarchies were introduced in Plato's thinking and practice of emancipation thanks to his initial assumption that only the intellectual had access to the knowledge that could free, or, more basically, that everyone was *not* equally capable of thinking. It was this assumption that necessitated a hierarchical social order and a hierarchical system of education. As we can see, then, this hypothesis about the reproductive power of our initial assumptions suggests a line of questioning for Rancière that helps him critique Plato's schema. It demands his readers ask, for example: is emancipation really linked to acquiring a certain kind of knowledge? are there really those who can think freely and those who cannot? does the intellectual really possess the sole claim over this ability to acquire knowledge and this capacity to think?

In fact, Rancière's analysis suggests that if these basic assumptions of the Platonic schema are left unquestioned, then even if we appear to be offering non-Platonic analyses of emancipation, politics or education we may still be perpetuating the cycles of inequality he introduced. Indeed, Rancière's analysis highlights how beyond introducing the problematic of an emancipatory education that frees us from an oppressive social authority, Plato's influence can also be detected in the dichotomy of reality and illusion, the intellectual's aim to reveal a hidden truth, the turn to education as an instrument of social harmonization, the desire to assign and keep everyone in their proper place, the distinction between the sphere of education and the sphere of democratic politics and the freedom that belongs to each, etc. The implication of his analysis is, then, that each of these inheritances follows from Plato's initial assumption of inequality, his initial

assumption that some people are capable of thinking ‘freely’ and some are not. What can seem like an innocuous distinction between reality and illusion, for instance, can also play a role in a broader schema that perpetuates inequality. Therefore, although on the one hand Rancière critiques continue to participate in Plato’s schema, they also break from it insofar as they shift our analytic focus from ‘freeing’ ourselves from illusions to tracing out the effect of initial assumptions of equality or inequality. In so doing they are part of what he calls his attempt to instigate a “decisive upheaval” of Plato’s schema.¹⁷⁵

Thus, the critiques we have examined in this chapter were partially inspired by the same insight about emancipation that initiates his more general shift towards a problematic of equality and inequality. We will explore this shift in detail in Chapter 4. However, at this point what is important to emphasize is that Rancière’s critiques illuminate a more complex Platonic inheritance that shapes our thinking about politics and education. On the one hand, Plato institutes the paradox of education that continues to inspire much of our political thinking about education insofar as he assumes that education has an emancipatory role. On the other hand, his own approach to education is often authoritarian and fundamentally antidemocratic. Indeed, the way Plato encourages us to think about the free-thinking at the heart of emancipation seems to introduce a fundamental inequality into all his analyses.

In the following chapter, we will be able to note Plato’s influence within various approaches to education here in North America. Each trend in political thinking about education that we will examine in the chapter is motivated, in one way or another, by the paradox of education. Thus, questions of freedom and authority frame how problems of

¹⁷⁵ Rancière, “The Method of Equality”, 275.

education are approached. However, we will also see Plato's influence in the dogmatism of some of these approaches and the inequality that seems to be rooted in many of the assumptions that guide their thinking about education.

Chapter 3: Politics and Education in North America

In this chapter we will examine the most common trends and perspectives on politics and education in North America today. To do this, my analysis will be divided into three, longish sections: the first section looks at the mainstream trends and perspectives on politics and education in North America today; the second section looks at more radical trends and perspectives on politics and education in North America today; and the third section looks at a couple of thinkers whose political thinking about education breaks the mould. In each section, we will highlight the particular ways the problematic of freedom and authority shapes political thinking about education, as well as the consequences that follow from this.

Mainstream Approaches:

Interestingly, many of the mainstream trends and discourses on politics and education in North America today play lip service to the problematic of freedom and authority, but studiously avoid struggling with any of the problems or questions it raises. In other words, they ignore the paradox it poses almost completely. They manage this by focusing the discussion on *values*. If one was sympathetic to this focus on values, one could perhaps argue that the mainstream had achieved a shift in problematic away from the problematic of freedom and authority towards a more promising problematic for thinking politics and education. However, I will try to show that what the mainstream has done is not shift to a new problematic, but rather stay within the same problematic and suppress the difficult issues that this problematic raises. This is done by sidestepping the issue of authority in education, and by speaking instead in terms of values, values which

are somehow irreproachable and beyond critique. It is as if it is hoped that a focus on values will make the problem of authority disappear. Indeed, if one begins with values, then the problem of imposing an authority on students through education appears less dramatic: one can think of education not as an imposition of a certain way of life, but rather as a nurturing of values that more than likely are already believed in.

Despite the determined naive optimism of this values approach, the problem that authority poses for education still remains. There are many conflicts over what values should be taught to students, and some people who advocate a values approach to education are concerned by the fact that a values education can be an imposition on minority groups in society in particular. However, I will try to show that despite these conflicts and concerns, because all values approaches to education try to downplay the problems that authority poses for education, they tend to adopt a dogmatic and conservative position. As such, not only does the problematic of freedom and authority maintain a solid grip on mainstream debates about politics and education, but these perspectives tend to give unconditional support for authority in education, as well as encourage the reproduction of the status quo. Instead of displacing the paradox of education that was articulated by Weber, Arendt and Adorno, the mainstream approach to politics and education simply tries to diminish the tensions that these modern thinkers so brilliantly illuminated. To illustrate this, in the following section I will examine a few of the practices and the authors that are representative of the mainstream approach to politics and education in order to highlight these limitations.

Most mainstream interest in politics and education in North America today focuses on civic education. In turn, much of this interest in civic education springs from a

concern about the evidence of declining voter turnouts, lack of civic engagement, and decreasing citizen knowledge about our political system and current political affairs. In Canada during the last 40 years this evidence has led to calls for a variety of reforms: electoral reform, the need for new and improved political parties, more participatory programs for citizen engagement, etc. Most frequently, however, what it is said that we need is more informed, knowledgeable and engaged citizens.¹⁷⁶ As such, there has been a push to improve and update civic education. For instance, in 1997 the Ontario government introduced for the first time a mandatory civics course for all grade 10 students. The goal was to explicitly teach civic education to all secondary school students, instead of hoping that a civic spirit would develop on its own and that students would learn the basics about our political institutions in other mandatory courses, such as history or geography.¹⁷⁷ The new civics course was thus designed both to counter the ‘knowledge deficit’ among young people about how our political institutions work and to foster the kind of student that would be more likely to engage in their community and, in the future, vote. In fact, the creation of the new civics course in Ontario was part of a Canadian-wide movement to update civics education. As Sears and Hughes point out in their 1996 study of educational reform in Canada, there was a movement across the provinces to design curriculum that would not simply inform students about their political institutions, but also encourage more “active citizenship”¹⁷⁸, promote values and

¹⁷⁶ See, for instance, Henry Milner, *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work*, Hanover N.H: University Press of New England, 2002.

¹⁷⁷ Mark Evans, “Educating for Citizenship: What Teachers Say, and What Teachers Do,” *Canadian Journal of Education* Vol.9 No.2, (2006), 415.

¹⁷⁸ Alan M. Sears and Andrew S. Hughes, “Citizenship Education and Current Educational Reform,” *Canadian Journal of Education* Vol. 21 No.2, (1996), 129.

dispositions that are compatible with tolerance and multiculturalism¹⁷⁹, and produce “globally-minded” students.¹⁸⁰

More recently, in November 2009 the Harper government also released an updated citizenship training manual for new immigrants to Canada—*Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*. It would seem that the primary reason the Conservative government wanted to update this manual was that they were concerned with social cohesion: they wanted the manual to introduce new immigrants to a narrative of a shared Canadian history and identity so that once new immigrants became citizens they would participate properly in this history and identity. Although their new manual also stressed the long-held “value” of multiculturalism in Canada, more emphasis was placed on how values such as multiculturalism were a part of a unified Canadian identity and history. Indeed, the manual underlines that despite this value of multiculturalism, Canada does not condone “barbaric cultural practices” and, moreover, has a long history of making “sacrifices to defend our way of life”.¹⁸¹ The message is clear: Canada may uphold tolerance, may be a country of immigrants, may be open to the world, but this does not mean that it has any less of a strong, cohesive identity and history that immigrants must learn and adopt.

These, and other, attempts to rework civic education have sparked, not surprisingly, many debates over what the aim of these new civic education programs should be and what they should look like. To be sure, as Sears and Hughes identified there is a distinguishable pattern among the provinces civic education policies. In fact,

¹⁷⁹ Sears and Hughes, “Citizenship Education and Current Educational Reform”, 131.

¹⁸⁰ Sears and Hughes, “Citizenship Education and Current Educational Reform”, 133.

¹⁸¹ *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*, last modified December 5th, 2013, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/discover.pdf>, 9 and 3.

Howard and Patten argue that even among those who disagree more fundamentally about the aims of civic education there is a shared desire to promote “active citizenship” and “global-mindedness”.¹⁸² In other words, there is agreement over what basic “values” a civic education should promote. However, where the disagreement arises is over what is actually meant by these values of “active citizenship” and “global-mindedness”. In fact, one can define the values of “active” and “global-minded” to suit quite a broad range of political agendas. For instance, Weistheimer and Kahne argue that there are three main models of citizen education today in North America (which of course are not always found in their most pure form) that aim at three different political ideals of the citizen: “the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen”.¹⁸³ Each model of civic education aims at a different political vision, and thus offers a different conception of the values of “active citizenship” and “global-mindedness” that are to be fostered therein.

For example, civic education programs designed to create the personally responsible citizen tend to focus on developing students character and morals so that they will be more likely to become actively involved in their community—volunteering, donating blood, voting, etc.—and will care more about the welfare of others in less fortunate circumstances.¹⁸⁴ An example of such a program is the Ohio state-initiated *American Centre for Civic Character*, which identified the main problem of citizens today as “cynicism” and designed a series of workshops meant to re-educate cynical and

¹⁸² Cosmo Howard and Steve Patten, “Valuing Civics: Political Commitment and the New Citizenship Education in Australia,” *Canadian Journal of Education* Vol. 29 No. 2, (2006), 460.

¹⁸³ Joel Weistheimer and Joseph Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,” *American Educational Research Journal* Vol. 41, No.2, (2004), 239.

¹⁸⁴ Weistheimer and Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen?”, 241.

disengaged adults, rather than only their children.¹⁸⁵ These “character-building” workshops asked participants to reform their ethical outlook according to 20 core values and traits (such as, compassion for others, excellence, accountability, etc.) with the hope that they would become more “active” leaders in their community—“example-setting, visionary and sacrificial leaders who are willing to risk their comfort and reputation”¹⁸⁶ and generally more honest and respectful citizens who are concerned with their community and the world. The initiative hopes that their attempts to rejuvenate “American character” might lead adult citizens, and thereby also their children, to become more “personally responsible” emotionally, physically and financially.¹⁸⁷ They also hope that this will lead adults to engage in initiatives that would improve their community, and thereby reaffirm American values and way of life, and in so doing act as an exemplar for the rest of the world.¹⁸⁸ Thus, in this program the active citizen is imagined as a responsible, entrepreneurial individual whose strong character makes him or her a leader in his or her community, and the “globally-minded” citizen is imagined as the proud American who is an example of hard-work and innovation in the context of a rapidly changing global order.

In contrast, civic education programs that aim to encourage more participation among citizens tend to focus on introducing students to local and national political organizations and processes with the hope that students will become actively involved in such organizations and processes and will also be prepared for such participation because they have learnt the requisite skills—politically informed, competent organizers and

¹⁸⁵ “Summary”, Ohio Center for Civic Character, last modified June 2nd, 2010, <http://www.characterusa.org>, 1.

¹⁸⁶ “Collaboration”, Ohio Centre for Civic Character, 5.

¹⁸⁷ “Community”, Ohio Centre for Civic Character, 13.

¹⁸⁸ “Community”, Ohio Centre for Civic Character, 14.

fundraisers, familiar with democratic decision making, etc.¹⁸⁹ An example of civic education programs with this participatory focus are the citizen-assembly type programs run by *MASS Led by the People*—a public consultation company based in Toronto.¹⁹⁰ The aim of the *MASS LBP* programs is not only to provide “public consultation” for governments or corporations, but also to educate citizens through their “civic engagement”. As citizens participate in these programs designed generally to advise government or corporations on a policy issue, they learn about the issues surrounding the policy under discussion, as well as about the process of democratic decision-making and consensus-building. As such, the hope is that citizens will gain “confidence and knowledge, and an improved sense of agency and inclusion”. Thus, much of the emphasis in such participatory civic education programs is on creating more “active” citizens; however, the active, participatory citizen is not the entrepreneurial individual, but the respectful and conscientious “member” who understands and can navigate “democratic” political processes. As with the personal responsibility approach, the aim of “global-mindedness” is not necessarily as explicit, and yet the participatory programs of *MASS LBP* all rely on a “values” approach which aims to begin the process of decision making by identifying shared values, many of which are “globally” oriented, such as tolerance and respect for difference, from which a consensus around a policy issue might be able to be achieved. Moreover, during the decision-making processes itself, citizens are frequently encouraged to see the connections between the local policy issue they are dealing with, and broader global trends. Thus, participatory approaches to civic education tend to emphasize the active citizen who is comfortable with political organization and

¹⁸⁹ Weistheimer and Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen?”, 242.

¹⁹⁰ MASS Led By People, last modified December 5th 2013, <http://www.masslbp.com/processes.php>

democratic decision-making, but this active citizen also shares a global outlook—they have contemporary global values, and they can see how the local issues they struggle to solve are related to “unavoidable” changes at the global level.

Finally, civic education programs aiming to promote justice-oriented citizens tend to focus on teaching students “to analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic and political forces” so that students can become more aware of their position amid these social, economic and political structures and thereby learn to engage accordingly.¹⁹¹ This approach to civic education is less common in schools and public-private initiatives; however it is quite common in various university programs and many teacher education programs.¹⁹² Indeed, there are many programs that encourage teachers to adopt a “justice-oriented” approach to civic education in their classrooms, even if this approach is not the stated intention of the curriculum they are supposed to teach. For instance, an example of this is *Teaching for Change*, an organization that promotes social justice education through professional development, publishing and distributing alternative resources, and running workshops. As they explain, by “drawing direct connection to ‘real’ world issues, *Teaching for Change* encourages teachers and students to question and re-think the world inside and outside their classrooms, build a more equitable, multicultural society and become active global citizens”.¹⁹³ In their book of “inspirational” lesson plans—*Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching*—they challenge teachers to go beyond a curriculum that simply informs students about the

¹⁹¹ Weistheimer and Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen?”. 242.

¹⁹² See, for example, the program description for “Humanities, Social Sciences, and Social Justice Education” at the *Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto*, last modified December 5th, 2013, http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/hsssje/Prospective_Students/HSSSJE_Graduate_Programs/Sociology_in_Education/index.html.

¹⁹³ See *Teaching For Change*, last modified December 5th, 2013, www.teachingforchange.org.

dates, events and motivations of the civil rights movement.¹⁹⁴ Their aim is to get students to “develop a critical analysis of United States history and strategies for change”.

Students are expected to learn from their historical investigations about structures of power and oppression, but also about how people organized to challenge and fight to change such structures. Thus, the active citizen according to the justice-oriented approach to civic education is one who is knowledgeable about the social, political and economic forces at work in their world, and who acts in accordance with such understanding. The global-minded citizen is a person who understands the connection between local and global change—both the local and the global are under the sway of social, political and economic forces—and who also recognizes the importance of championing values, such as equity, inclusiveness, diversity, etc., globally.

We can see, then, that these three approaches to civic education aim to create different kinds of “active” and “global” citizens: the exemplary American entrepreneurial leader of the free-world, the dutiful democratic participant embodying cosmopolitan values and struggling to get their community to adapt to global trends, and the social-justice activist promoting diversity and equity in their community and abroad.

Interestingly, however, despite having different models of the ideal citizen as their goal, these approaches all share the idea that civic education can or should begin from values. The “personal responsibility” approaches are obviously explicit about their desire to create better citizens by improving citizens’ values, but both the participatory and justice-oriented approaches to civic education also tend to base their programs on the cultivation of values among citizens. The participatory approach generally assumes that many of

¹⁹⁴ *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching*, last modified December 5th, 2013, www.civilrightsteaching.org.

these values are already held by citizens—respect, accountability, fairness, non-discrimination, etc.—and hopes to run successful decision-making processes based on the fundamental agreement that these already-in-place values lend. In contrast, although some justice-oriented civic education programs try to avoid the language of values, most accept it and see themselves as encouraging citizens to adopt more progressive values as they learn about the systems of oppression, racism, patriarchy, etc. Thus, not only does the mainstream advocate for civic education—rather than, for instance, a separation between politics and education—but this civic education is conceived of as an education in values.

This common emphasis on values among the diverse approaches to civic education raises some questions. First, what is the significance of different political perspectives sharing a values approach to education? Is the values approach really so open to political appropriation or does it not imply a particular view of the world? If it does imply a particular view of the world, is this view at cross-purposes with any of the political perspectives that employ it? Second, if one bases civic education on values that are generally not questioned once the program of education has begun, are you not removing the most important political debates from discussion? How can civic education promote the aim of “free-thinking”—which most civic education programs also claim to do—if it is based on accepting the authority of a certain slate of values?

These two sets of questions raise again, in different ways, the problem of authority. Unfortunately, however, most proponents of the values approach to education do not address this problem of authority. This is because, it seems, they are interested in getting on with the business of education: if one bogs oneself down with questions over

what to teach children and who should decide what gets taught, then many lessons that most people think are important and valuable will be overlooked. Better to get on with it and teach what we are fairly confident most people will support: values such as ‘active’ and ‘global-minded’, or ‘responsible’, ‘caring’, ‘respectful’, ‘tolerant’, etc. The problem of authority, in other words, is assumed to be not such a problem: if one limits what is taught to values almost everyone can agree on, and if the teacher is reasonably fair and kind, then why all this fuss about the problem of authority to begin with? Yes, education involves authority, but so what?

Although there is certainly some wisdom in this spirit of getting on with things, the refusal to consider issues of authority also speaks to a willingness to impose one’s vision for society dogmatically. In fact, the desire to implement one’s vision of a more active and globally-minded citizenry through civic education is an example of the Platonic impulse to turn to education as a non-political solution to social problems. If civic education fosters the right values in all citizens, then various social ills can be addressed: political cynicism and disengagement can be overcome, a can-do attitude can be reinforced, racist views can be eradicated, oppressive ignorance can be cast off, etc. Moreover, what is useful about the basing one’s civic education on ‘values’ is that their abstract, feel-goodness covers over political divisions and disagreements. Quite simply, one’s program is less likely to get sidetracked by political battles.

For some, however, the question of authority requires more justification. A number of contemporary political thinkers have offered defenses of civic education programs that aim to promote a certain slate of values. Two famous examples of these are, from a conservative perspective, Edward Wynne’s *Reclaiming Our Schools*:

Teaching Character, Academics and Discipline, and, from a liberal perspective, Eamonn Callan's *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. Wynne argues that we must embrace the conservative and reproductive purpose of education, and thus calls for a return to teaching the values that support the American way of life;¹⁹⁵ and Callan argues that although the state must be impartial to different ways of life its citizens may choose, the state must engage in at least a minimal amount of "soulcraft" in order to ensure the existence of the liberal democratic values that our system of liberal-democracy relies on.¹⁹⁶ In both these works there is quite a sophisticated attempt to justify the imposition of a particular social and political authority through education. What this suggests is that although most discussions of the values approach to education avoid the problem of authority, it nonetheless lurks within these discussions to such an extent that many political thinkers feel compelled to address it.

In fact, in the following few pages we will examine in more detail a defense of an authority for education that shares many of the same characteristics as Wynne and Callan's analyses: Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education*. Like Wynne and Callan, Gutmann feels compelled to offer a defense of the authority she believes should preside over education in North America. Her text provides another example, therefore, of how the problematic of freedom and authority is not displaced by the values approach, but rather frames it. What is of further interest about her analysis is that, like Wynne and Callan, although she addresses certain problems of authority in education, she generally tries to minimize any tensions it might create. Instead of struggling with the paradox of

¹⁹⁵ Edward A. Wynne, *Reclaiming Our Schools: Teaching Character, Academics, and Discipline* 2nd Edition (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 129.

¹⁹⁶ Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

education like Weber, Arendt and Adorno, she attempts to make this paradox disappear. She does this in two ways: by ignoring the problem of the authority of the teacher and by arguing that the authority that education ought to promote is the authority that actually allows students to think freely. There is no paradox of education between the authority necessary in teaching and teaching's aim of free-thinking if one institutes the 'right' authority. Although there may be something important to take from her argument, I will argue that it points to both the dogmatism and conservativeness of the values approach to education.

Let us take a closer look, then, at Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education*. For Gutmann the problem of authority in education amounts to the problem of ensuring that the authority involved in education is 'democratic'. She argues that authority in education is unavoidable: we do not want any and all lessons taught to our children, we do want certain values to be respected, and we do hope that they will learn to participate in a democracy in a certain way.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, we certainly do not believe that children themselves are old enough to make all the decisions about their education.¹⁹⁸ Given this, parents and society in general must have authority over their children's education.¹⁹⁹ In other words, if we are looking for a 'democratic' authority for education, it must be parents and society that form the 'democratic' base, not the children. It is parents and society in general who should decide democratically what values, what lessons, what programs should be taught to their children. Of course, the difficulties arise when one must decide who among parents, teachers/experts, local or national political units should

¹⁹⁷ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 9.

¹⁹⁸ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 36.

¹⁹⁹ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 42.

be given a say, by how much, and by what processes. As she writes, the “central question posed by democratic education is: Who should have authority to shape the education of future citizens”?²⁰⁰ In fact, the bulk of Gutmann’s analysis in this book is dedicated to investigating the specificities of how democratic decisions about what has authority in education might be reached. For, as she insists, there will inevitably be disagreement and conflict over what authority should preside over education.²⁰¹

The way Gutmann proposes to bring together these conflicting views over what the authority should be in education is quite telling. First, she defines education as “conscious social reproduction”.²⁰² Interestingly, embedded in her definition of education as “conscious social reproduction” is her commitment to liberal democracy: “conscious social reproduction” is not defined as, say, the social engineering by the elites of a society, but as “the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behaviour of future citizens”.²⁰³ Therefore, education as “conscious social reproduction”, for Gutmann, already includes within it a commitment to democratic decision-making. This is why she can later claim that “conscious social reproduction” can be a principle that can guide democratic decision-making around what authority should preside over education.²⁰⁴ For, if “conscious social reproduction” necessitates that one must choose an authority for education that ensures children will be “capable of participating in collectively shaping their society” in the future, then one’s definition of education already guarantees that the only legitimate authority over education can be one that maintains democratic decision-

²⁰⁰ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 16.

²⁰¹ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 11.

²⁰² Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 14.

²⁰³ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 14.

²⁰⁴ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 39.

making. In other words, Gutmann's definition of education has already slipped in a commitment to democratic decision-making, and also the maintenance of a liberal-democratic society. For, after all, the aim is to *reproduce*, albeit consciously and democratically, the current form of liberal-democratic society that exists in America today.

Even more interesting for us, however, is how she deals with the cultivation of free-thinking in education. Indeed, since Gutmann wants above all for education to ensure that future citizens are capable of participating in liberal-democratic society, she must also ensure that what has authority in education does not, in turn, tyrannize or oppress the students. This requires that to some degree the students themselves must be introduced to democratic deliberation and decision-making. As we have seen, this is the one cap to the control the democratic majority should have over education: they cannot undermine the future of democracy itself.²⁰⁵ So to guarantee that the democratically decided upon authority in education does not prevent future citizens from democratic decision-making, Gutmann proposes that education promote “*democratic virtue*”²⁰⁶. This means two things: on the one hand, it means education should cultivate character traits, values, and dispositions that are needed in, and supportive of, democracy;²⁰⁷ and on the other hand, it means education should teach “critical deliberation”.²⁰⁸ In fact, it is with this insistence on the necessity of teaching “critical deliberation”, or in other words ‘free-thinking’ that Gutmann hopes to distinguish her argument for a democratic education from a purely authoritative defense of liberal democratic values in education. In other

²⁰⁵ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 44.

²⁰⁶ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 46.

²⁰⁷ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 43.

²⁰⁸ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 44.

words, because students are to be taught to think critically, they are not simply being brainwashed with liberal democratic values. They are also being taught to think and engage critically themselves. So, in order to make sure that critical deliberation can be taught Gutmann argues that the authority that presides over education must abide by two principles: “nonrepression” and “nondiscrimination”. This way the values and lessons an authority might teach do not inhibit “*rational* deliberation or consideration of different ways of life”.²⁰⁹ Critical deliberation requires that one does not unduly oppress and discriminate against certain groups or ideas, or is not oneself oppressed or discriminated against by certain groups or ideas.

However, critical deliberation for Gutmann also clearly requires a certain kind of character: those who critically deliberate must not only abide by the principles of “nonrepression” and “nondiscrimination”, they must also be “morally serious people”. As Gutmann writes, the “willingness and ability to deliberate set morally serious people apart from both sophists, who use clever argument to elevate their own interests into self-righteous causes, and traditionalists, who invoke established authority to subordinate their own reason to unjust causes”.²¹⁰ Thus, the ability to critically deliberate is inseparable in Gutmann’s mind from a person of character, a person who values “reasonableness” and liberal democracy. This is why she argues for the cultivation of a democratic virtue, rather than simply the teaching of democratic processes, democratic systems, etc. Democratic virtue is the synthesis of the values and dispositions that uphold a liberal democracy and the ability to deliberate rationally based on those values.²¹¹ Critical

²⁰⁹ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 44.

²¹⁰ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 52.

²¹¹ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 46.

deliberation is not complete ‘free-thinking’ but, as she defines it, the capacity “to make hard choices in situations where habits and authorities do not supply clear or consistent guidance”.²¹² In fact, rationality itself would seem for Gutmann to be almost indistinguishable from reasoning according to liberal democratic principles. What we can see, then, is that the “free-thinking” that Gutmann hopes education can cultivate cannot actually challenge the liberal democratic authority that defines it.

Therefore, although Gutmann sees herself as articulating a vision for education that is authoritative but also promotes free-thinking, upon closer examination the free-thinking she hopes to promote is indistinguishable from the dominant authority presiding over education. In other words, she does not provide us a way of thinking an education that is *more* than simply authoritative: there is little meaningful free-thinking within her vision of education, because free-thinking is defined as thinking in accordance with liberal-democratic principles. Indeed, what should have been noticed is the circularity of Gutmann’s argument for a democratic authority for education: the political and social authority of the day is a liberal democratic authority; through democratic procedures this overarching political and social authority will determine what authority should preside over the education of its future citizens, and, in turn, future citizens will learn to think ‘freely’ under the influence and within the bounds of the principles of this liberal democratic authority. In no uncertain terms, then, even if its specific content shifts over time, the ultimate and unquestionable authority that presides over education is the liberal democratic authority that happens to predominate in North America today. As she writes, “Democratic education supplies the foundations upon which a democratic society can

²¹² Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 51.

secure the civil and political freedoms of its adult citizens without placing their welfare or its very survival at great risk”.²¹³ Thus, the most important task of education is the preservation of this already-in-place liberal democratic authority.

In fact, this is quite clear if one notes what Gutmann’s recommendations are for how democratic decision-making should take place: although she tries to begin from first principles, as it were, she ends up advocating without fail the same social and political arrangements and processes that exist in the U.S. today²¹⁴. Of course, she does argue for more fairness, more money for the system, etc.,²¹⁵ but she does not argue for any substantial change to how political decisions about education are made. Thus, we might summarize her position as follows: Gutmann wants a democratic “conscious social reproduction” *of the status quo*. As such, Gutmann’s vision of a democratic education is fundamentally conservative: she wants the authority in education to mirror and reproduce the dominant political and social authority. Although Gutmann herself would be loathe to admit it, her description of a democratic education is a perfect example of what Arendt argues education should be: a conservative activity that simply reproduces the status quo and does not aim to ‘free’ students or teach them how to think independently of its own commitments.

Our examination of Gutmann’s argument, therefore, highlights the closed and circular nature of a values approach to education. Her analysis exhibits how a focus on values is really a more polite way of discussing what *authority* education intends to

²¹³ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 289.

²¹⁴ See, for instance, her discussion of which levels of government should be involved in decisions on education, Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 71-75; or her discussion of whether spending more could help schools who teach disadvantaged children, Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 153-155.

²¹⁵ Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 223.

promote. Moreover, it makes clear that the set of values that a civic education desires to cultivate will also determine the ideal political citizen and the ideal scope of politics. Gutmann's book thus helps to illustrate how the values approach to education deals with the problem of authority in education by becoming dogmatic: authority poses less of a problem for education if it is assumed that the authority one inculcates is simply 'the best' or at least so minimal that no one could possibly have a problem with it! If one dogmatically supports a particular authority for education, one no longer has to worry about any paradoxes of freedom and authority. Interestingly, political conservatives and left-wingers are much more likely to be conscious of their dogmatic commitment than liberals like Gutmann. Most of the comfortable liberal majority refuse to acknowledge their dogmatic commitment and instead insist that since the values that they wish to promote are so widespread in society, they are not an imposition at all. This is what makes them *values* and not a 'foreign' authority. The conservative nature of the liberal majority's project obscures their dogmatism: how can they be dogmatic if all they are facilitating is the reproduction of the status quo?

In fact, this is one reason that it might be a problem for political conservatives and left-wingers to adopt a values approach to education. If conservative, liberal and left political perspectives are all trying to teach values of active and global citizenship, for instance, then important political differences can be obscured and the overall impression of consensus can be strengthened. And, it is more than likely that the dominant liberal version of these values will come to be authoritative. Indeed, because values are assumed to be self-evident and unquestionable, this lends more support to common sense beliefs that are already in place than it does to values or beliefs that are at odds with the status

quo. Therefore, conservative or left-wing education programs that rely on a values approach are likely to be pulled to the centre, pulled towards a reproduction of the liberal status quo. Moreover, the terminology of “values” in the first place speaks to a fundamental liberal view of the world: individuals hold different values or practice different ways of life and these should not be dictated by the state. Interestingly, however, as liberalism has secured its dominance, ‘values’ have come to refer to not only the differences between the ways one can lead one’s life, but also the sameness of the liberal way of life. Liberalism is a fundamental value within which one can choose a range of other values. Thus, the widespread acceptance of a values approach to education suggests a widespread acceptance of a liberal conservatism: by focusing on values, the liberal view of the world permeates the discussions of civic education and civic education is designed to reproduce this liberal view of the world. Given this, one can argue that the values approach to education, in all its forms and political guises, tends towards conserving the liberal order that exists.

Therefore, Gutmann’s analysis helps to illustrate how the values approach to education downplays the problem that ‘authority’ poses for ‘freedom’ by promoting a dogmatic and conservative agenda of civic education. Her analysis also shows how this tactic can include absorbing ‘freedom’ into ‘authority’. This is an interesting move that one can identify in many defenses of an authoritative approach to education which try to distinguish the practice they want from straightforward ‘brainwashing’ or ‘soul-craft’. On the one hand, when authors like Gutmann define the free-thinking that education is to foster in the terms of the authority they wish to promote this seems quite suspicious. How can free-thinking be so strictly defined, for instance, as to include *only* reasoning

according to liberal democratic principles? Or, in a different vein, as to include *only* the critical examination of oppression? Does not the ‘free’ in free-thinking imply that such thinking should be able to pursue any number of different lines of analysis or ways of thinking? Even more disturbing is the tendency of authors to believe that only the authority they wish to promote is capable of encouraging free-thinking. It is not only that they desire that free-thinking be thought of in the terms of their desired authority, but that *only* this authority makes free-thinking possible. We can see this belief manifest in the writings of many mainstream liberal authors who argue that it is only through a liberal democratic education that students will learn to think freely and be capable of autonomy.²¹⁶ If students follow the ways of thinking of their minority cultures, for instance, they will never learn to think freely. They must be taught to think like a liberal individual in order to be free. This position is amazingly arrogant, not to mention racist. Freedom is completely absorbed into, and defined by, the dominant authority. There is no tension left between them; indeed, no distance or space at all.

On the other hand, although we might be highly suspicious of many of these arguments, as we are of Gutmann’s, they do point to something important—an attempt to get past the stark dichotomy between freedom and authority. And this attempt, even if ultimately unsatisfactory, speaks to a fact that many who hold onto this dichotomy too firmly prefer to ignore: there can be freedom within authority. Teaching values and ways of life can give students forms and institutions through which they can exercise certain

²¹⁶ See, for instance, K. Anthony Appiah’s “Liberal Education: The United States Example”, Walter Feinberg’s “Religious Education in Liberal Democratic Societies: The Question of Accountability and Autonomy”, and Melissa S. Williams’ “Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education” in *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, Walter Feinberg and Kevin McDonough, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

kinds of freedom. It can give students practices of freedom to play with, to work with, to mobilize, etc. Despite its potentially stifling dogmatism, then, these attempts to define freedom in the terms of a particular authority do point beyond the paradox of education in this specific sense. By stubbornly avoiding a crippling preoccupation with the problems authority can pose, they demonstrate the freedoms that can exist within authority. They argue for particular practices of freedom that education can cultivate. Therefore, although the values approach to education is firmly embedded within the problematic of freedom and authority, it nevertheless contains an idea that is challenging to the problematic: the idea that the authority that operates within teaching does not necessarily negate the possibility of freedom.

Unfortunately, even though many of those who advocate a values approach to civic education stress the openness that their approach allows, most of their energy is nevertheless channelled into creating and defending the authority they wish to promote. All too often defenses of the values approach to education are less worried about the possibilities of freedom that exist within the scope of their vision, and are more interested, as we have seen, in using civic education to cement the status quo.

On a related note, the possibility that the values that these political thinkers want to defend could discriminate against or oppress some people, is also given very little credence. In Gutmann's case the values she defends are so minimal and so open she cannot imagine that anyone would be hurt by them, and in the case of a more conscious dogmatic like Wynne, the values he defends are those he thinks are best and most authentic in America, so he is not bothered if a few delusional types disagree. However, particularly in the Canadian context, many political thinkers who accept the values

approach to education do take the threat of its dogmatism more seriously. Beginning with ‘the fact of pluralism’, they worry that the values of liberal democratic society communicated through public education will oppress those who do not share liberal democratic values. Can liberal democracy reproduce itself through education without contradicting liberal tenets like openness to different ways of life? What challenge does multiculturalism pose, in other words, to liberal democratic education? This is clearly the more ‘liberal face’ of the values approach, one not solely concerned with making a defense of a certain slate of values, and one that conservative authors like Wynne deplore since it takes seriously the possibility that the values promoted through education can be forces of colonization and oppression.²¹⁷

A good example of this ‘liberal face’ of the values approach is Feinberg and McDonough’s edited volume *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*. In this volume they bring together essays from prominent political thinkers—such as Jeremy Waldron, Melissa Williams, and Anthony Appiah—which address the question of what role the state should take in education given increasing pluralism. The idea is: if the state’s education authoritatively promotes liberal values, by what right can it impose these values on less liberal minority groups?²¹⁸ As Feinberg and McDonough describe the problem in their introduction, education in multicultural societies creates a conflict between two liberal-democratic aims: the desire to promote a child’s autonomy and the desire to “maintain group integrity”.²¹⁹ Is state education oppressing a minority if it teaches liberal democratic values that they do not hold? Or, if state education limits its

²¹⁷ Wynne, *Reclaiming Our Schools*, 128.

²¹⁸ Feinberg and McDonough, *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, 3.

²¹⁹ Feinberg and McDonough, *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, 8.

promotion of liberal democratic values, is it foregoing its responsibility to encourage free-thinking, or, more precisely the ability of a student to be autonomous? How should state education negotiate this conflict? In their words, “What is the state to count as a reasonable educational interest, and how far can a cultural or a religious group go in shaping a child’s loyalty?”²²⁰

There are a few interesting aspects of the agenda of this volume that are immediately striking. For example, it is clear that the problematic of freedom and authority still frames the analysis. However, the problematic is more complicated: the defense of the values approach is complicated by a recognition that the values of one group can oppress another. More specifically, what the essays in this volume probe, is the tension that education exposes in liberal democracy between group rights and individual autonomy. Thus, there are more accurately two problematics of freedom and authority at play in the essays in this volume: one, which mirrors the defences we have already examined that believe that authoritatively teaching liberal democratic values is essential for the promotion of free-thinking and autonomy; and the other which holds that a majority group in society should not impose their authority on a minority group’s freedom to lead a different way of life. What is attempted, then, is to find a way to balance or integrate the liberal democratic state’s promotion of autonomy with the values of a minority group. This way no one will be oppressed, but the aim of the free-thinking autonomous individual will be preserved. What is not questioned, however, is whether a liberal democratic values approach to education really has the only claim over teaching ‘free-thinking’, and whether a liberal democratic values approach to education might

²²⁰ Feinberg and McDonough, *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, 7.

oppress not only a group's culture, but also an individual's ability to think freely. In other words, the two problematics of freedom and authority are strictly separated so that liberalism's claim to autonomy and free-thinking are not questioned. In this way, the debate can be contained to a discussion of how far a state should go to accommodate minority group values in education.

Therefore, this more 'liberal face' of the values approach takes dogmatism more seriously only in a very limited sense. Liberal democratic values can only oppress minority groups and this oppression can be mitigated if minority groups are allowed some influence over their children's education. The idea that a civic education in liberal democratic values could be more generally oppressive and authoritarian is not considered a possibility. As such, the problem that authority can pose for freedom in education is not fully addressed. Indeed, what is clear is that although the problematic of freedom and authority remains stubbornly in place in the values approaches to education, its own insights and tensions are not taken as seriously. In fact, although a few consider the problem of the authority of *what* is taught in education, few consider the problem of the authority of *who* teaches. This means that the problem of authority is diminished on two fronts: *what* should be taught in education is dogmatically defended, even if this dogmatism is softened and limited, and the power of *who* teaches is ignored.

This is troubling not only because of the dogmatism and conservatism it encourages, but also because of its acceptance of these in the spirit of getting on with things and finding a solution. When authors like Gutmann are more than willing to bend and compromise their liberal principles for the sake of reproducing liberalism, this suggests that they are more concerned with 'solutions' that allow liberal democratic society to

continue untroubled, than they are with the problems of politics and education. The goal of civic education itself, for instance, is never questioned, nor is the aim of value-amelioration. Therefore, the solution-orientation of the values approach to civic education closes it off from the start from asking the difficult questions or pursuing new possibilities. It assumes that the task of education is the non-political effort to improve and strengthen the status quo.

Radical Approaches:

Besides the mainstream focus on civic education, there is also a prolific radical tradition in thinking about politics and education in North America. Interestingly, writings on politics and education from more critical perspectives are not only framed by the problematic of freedom and authority, but also tend to exaggerate it. Whereas mainstream approaches often try to downplay the tensions of the problematic of freedom and authority in order to get on with the business of education, critical or radical approaches focus on and illuminate these tensions. In fact, they often present the problematic of freedom and authority as a stark dichotomy: on the one hand there is authority which oppresses, and on the other there is freedom that liberates. Education, unfortunately, has a history of representing authority. Whether one looks at the history of the school system, the teacher's control in the classroom, or the ideology that governs the curriculum, an oppressive authority seems to dominate. In many ways, the sensitivity to authority that is exhibited by these critical and radical approaches is refreshing compared to the dismissive attitude of much of the mainstream. However, worryingly, education

seems to become a hopeless cause. Although most critical and radical perspectives maintain a hope for an emancipatory education of some kind, the dichotomy between authority and freedom that they present makes such an education seem all the more impossible. For, how can there be education that avoids authority completely? What we will see, then, is that a preoccupation with the problems of authority sets up a dichotomy that if taken to its extreme leads to the abandonment of teaching altogether. So, whereas mainstream approaches to politics and education muted the paradox of education, radical approaches to politics and education tend to simplify it into a sharp either/or. In the following section we will explore two traditions that display this pattern in North America: the tradition of radical sociological critiques and the tradition of radical individualism.

To be sure, the tradition of sociological critiques of education, especially in North America, is not solely radical; for instance, there was a blossoming of functionalist analyses of education coming out of the Chicago school after the Second World War that praised schools for their role in creating and maintaining societal consensus. However, especially in the last 30 years, a more radical strain of sociological critique has come to dominate academic studies of education.²²¹ This radical tradition originates in Europe, and draws inspiration from thinkers like Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault. However, beginning in the mid 1970s, North American scholars, such as Bowles and Gintis in their influential work *Schooling in Capitalist America*, applied the ideas of this European tradition to the North American context. This unleashed a flurry of studies of schools and schooling, whose

²²¹ Scott Davies and Neil Guppy, *The Schooled Society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education* 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

themes now seem quite familiar to those of us in the social sciences—themes like the “hidden curriculum” or the correspondence between school and workplace culture.²²² In general, these studies analyse the various ways in which schools reproduce and reflect the interests and power of the elite. This may involve a critique of how elite ideology permeates school practices and curriculum, the ways in which schools socialize students for their future place in the workforce, the methods and criteria of assessment which reward students from elite backgrounds, the processes through which certain minorities are marginalized, the role of teachers in channelling the powers that be, the market pressures and principles that infiltrate schools and classrooms, or the legitimization of certain dominant knowledge and ways of knowing.²²³ Whatever the particular focus, these critiques draw a picture of schools as sites of reproduction of the social, political, and economic power and privilege of the elite.

Within these studies the problematic of freedom and authority is writ large. In particular, there is a general fascination with the power and effect of authority in schools and schooling. What interests sociologists of a radical bent, is how schools embody, communicate and instil the dominant, liberal-capitalist authority of the day. However, most radical sociologists avoid using terms like ‘authority’. Instead, they investigate the “social structures” which shape and determine human action.²²⁴ This move from authority to structure places emphasis not simply on the ‘values’ that an authority might represent, but the concrete forms, practices and institutions which an authority embodies. A focus

²²² Davies and Guppy, *The Schooled Society*, 45.

²²³ Davies and Guppy, *The Schooled Society*, see “Chapter 6: Unequal Student Attainment”, 117-155.

²²⁴ Davies and Guppy, *The Schooled Society*, 4.

on structure points to the solidity and external force of authority.²²⁵ Thus, sociologists translate the problematic of freedom and authority into a similar problematic of agency and structure, and this move gives more weight and substance to the problems of authority. Investigations of structure highlight from the outset the strength and influence of authority in society.

Indeed, it is clear that what captures the imagination of most radical sociologists of education is the form and power of this structure or authority. In North America, Michael Apple's work provides a good example of this trend. Although most recently, Apple has focused his attention on detailing the rise of the 'right', its competing strains, its creation of a new commonsense, and its consolidated attack on education,²²⁶ in earlier works most of his attention was devoted to hegemony more generally. For instance, in one of his famous first books, *Ideology and Curriculum*, he sets out to analyse how "the ideological configurations of dominant interests in society" manifest themselves in school practices, curriculum, and teacher perspectives and behaviour.²²⁷ This is done in order to counter both the neutrality of liberal analyses of schooling, and the one-sided focus on the economic role of schools by authors like Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis.²²⁸ Borrowing from Raymond Williams and Antonio Gramsci, Apple wishes to show, and underscore the importance of, the influence of ideas and cultural practices in securing the dominance of the elite in schools. To this end, Apple explores in detail such topics as the creation of high status knowledge,²²⁹ whose interests are represented in the overt and

²²⁵ Davies and Guppy, *The Schooled Society*, 6.

²²⁶ Michael Apple, *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality* New York and London: Routledge, 2006.

²²⁷ Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 3rd edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 12-13.

²²⁸ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 7 and 2.

²²⁹ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 33.

hidden curriculum of schools,²³⁰ how social norms are communicated to students,²³¹ how a “valuative” consensus is simultaneously assumed and created by schools and teachers,²³² the ways in which curriculum has come to be approached with a “technocratic ideology”,²³³ and how commonsense categories—like the ‘slow learner’ or the ‘discipline problem’—support dominant interests.²³⁴ Thus, his book is devoted to an examination of cultural and ideological structure of schools and schooling.

Despite the persuasiveness of many of Apple’s analyses, one cannot help but be struck by the absence of any discussion of ‘agency’. The only exception to this is a short discussion in the final chapter, when Apple writes of the need for a “critical curriculum community”. This community is needed because “one of the fundamental conditions of emancipation is the ability to ‘see’ the actual functionings of institutions in all their positive *and* negative complexity, to illuminate the contradictions of extant regularities, and, finally, to assist others (and let them assist us) in ‘remembering’ the possibilities of spontaneity, choice, and more equal models of control”.²³⁵ Therefore, even though Apple’s investigation broadens our understanding of authority in education it does little to help us imagine any freedom within education—other than offering a vague hope that the more people understand authority in education the more ‘free’ they will become.

More recent radical sociological studies of education also mirror this one-sided fascination with authority in education. Borrowing from Foucault in particular, these studies approach authority in education less as an economic or cultural structure, and

²³⁰ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 44.

²³¹ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 49.

²³² Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 59.

²³³ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 105.

²³⁴ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 122.

²³⁵ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 153-54.

more as the set of practices of power that constitute the modern, liberal individual. In an examination of Foucault's influence on studies of education, Bernadette Baker and Katherina Heyning claim that the sociological interest in Foucault has centered on a few key concepts, such as power-knowledge, discipline, governmentality and surveillance.²³⁶ As an illustration of this, an early edited volume by Thomas Popkewitz devoted to the importance of Foucault for education includes articles such as Bill Green's "Born Again Teaching? Grammar, Governmentality and Public Schooling" and Jennifer S. Gore's "Disciplining Bodies: On the Continuing of Power relations in Pedagogy". In the first of these articles, Green examines the figure of the teacher, specifically the English teacher, and examines how the teacher's pedagogical authority has been imagined and challenged over the last century. His basic argument is that in the 1960s the link between teacher and cultural-moral authority was disrupted by those interested in a new kind of teaching, and that this has spurred a series of 'crises' and attempts to restore a more traditional pedagogical authority in the English classroom.²³⁷ Moreover, he uses Foucault's concept of governmentality to illustrate the link between the dominant image and form of pedagogical authority, the dominant social-political authority of the day, and the type of self-governing student that is being formed.²³⁸ Interestingly, although Green highlights the disruption of the 60s, very little attention is paid to what caused this disruption and instead the focus is on analysing the reinstatement of authority through the current backlash.

²³⁶ Bernadette M. Baker and Katherina Elisabeth Heyning, *Dangerous Coagulations? The uses of Foucault in the Study of Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 31.

²³⁷ Bill Green, "Born Again Teaching? Grammar, Governmentality and Public Schooling", in *Foucault's challenge: discourse, power and knowledge in education* ed. Thomas S. Popkewitz and Marie Brennan (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1998), 178.

²³⁸ Green, "Born Again Teaching?", 185.

In the second of these articles, Gore examines “microlevel” pedagogical practices of disciplinary power²³⁹ in four different educational sites: a physical education classroom, a teacher education cohort, a feminist reading group and a women’s community discussion group.²⁴⁰ She explains that her study is motivated not only by an interest in power relations, but also by the sense that pedagogical practices vary little even among those with more radical or progressive agendas.²⁴¹ Foucault’s analyses of practices of power unfolding outside of institutions, even if they are formed in institutions, helps Gore explain this continuity. In particular, she borrows eight techniques of power described by Foucault in relation to penal institutions—surveillance, normalization, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualization, totalization and regulation—and shows how they operate in all four educational sites.²⁴² Again, Gore herself does not address how such techniques of power might be challenged and changed to form new forms of pedagogical practices that better suit radical agendas. Rather, she tries to defend her use of Foucault from the charge of pessimism and from the charge that this sort of analysis cripples action by overblowing the influence of power; she argues “that we must know what we are and what we are doing (in education), in order to begin to address adequately how we might do things differently”.²⁴³ Thus, in Gore’s article we hear again the familiar refrain that it is only if we can recognize and understand the operations of authority in education that we will be able to bring about a more emancipatory form of education.

²³⁹ Jennifer S. Gore, “Disciplining Bodies: On the Continuing of Power Relations in Pedagogy” in *Foucault’s challenge: discourse, power and knowledge in education* ed. Thomas S. Popkewitz and Marie Brennan (New York: Teacher’s College press, 1998), 232.

²⁴⁰ Gore, “Disciplining Bodies,” 234.

²⁴¹ Gore, “Disciplining Bodies,” 232.

²⁴² Gore, “Disciplining Bodies,” 234.

²⁴³ Gore, “Disciplining Bodies,” 248.

What is interesting to note, then, is that although there are diverse and conflicting approaches to investigating education, sociological studies of a radical bent are almost exclusively interested in mapping and explaining the influence of the dominant authority of the day. No matter whether their focus is on economic structures, ideology, hegemony, discipline, or governmentality, one can see that there is a general obsession with authority, broadly understood. In fact, there seems to be a shared sense—as both Apple and Gore’s texts speak to—that the dominant authority of the day is responsible for the creation and reproduction of inequality and injustice, and that in order to combat these, one must first understand how the dominant authority of the day operates. Therefore, the desire to understand the influence of authority in education is further legitimized by the idea that it is this very understanding that will eventually enable a more progressive, and emancipatory education.

Interestingly even though most radical sociological approaches to education never examine any forms of emancipatory education, they almost all maintain a hope for such an education. Unlike Arendt, for instance, few advocate limiting or dismissing education because it is an unavoidably conservative institution. Instead, education is condemned for its current conservativeness, but is still thought to be linked to emancipation. However, *how* exactly radical sociologists imagine education might be emancipatory is amazingly unclear. How might freedom, rather than authority, manifest itself in education? This question is given surprisingly little consideration. To be sure, like Apple and Gore, many suggest that there is a connection between understanding the influence of authority in education and emancipation, but virtually no energy is devoted to exploring how this might be the case. Given this, even though most studies are directed towards a general

hope for an emancipatory education, the radical sociological approach to education paints education as almost exclusively an authoritative practice. Their preoccupation with authority makes it hard to imagine education beyond an institution that simply reproduces the inequality and injustices of the status quo. Thus, radical sociological studies of education do little to help us think a more emancipatory education and instead serve mostly to solidify our scepticism of the mainstream approaches to civic education.

Moreover, because radical sociological studies of education fail to investigate any instances of freedom within education, they encourage a dichotomous understanding of the relationship between freedom and authority. Even if many radical sociologists would argue that freedom and authority are not necessarily opposed, their exclusive focus on authority as the author of inequality and injustice in education suggest that freedom must exist outside of these influences. Indeed, unlike the mainstream approaches, authority is not seen to promote any practice of freedom, and this gives the impression that authority is the antithesis of freedom. Put simply, despite their possible intentions otherwise, the radical sociological approaches to education simplify the modern paradox of freedom and authority in education. Education is not only associated with authority, but freedom appears as something opposed to both authority and education. Their studies paint a picture of authority as the opposite of freedom; and education is firmly placed on the side of authority. Not surprisingly, then, many influenced by the radical sociological critiques of education wonder whether education can ever be an emancipatory practice at all.

In fact, there is another tradition that has flourished particularly in North America that takes up this problem suggested by the radical sociological critiques seriously. I name and group this tradition under the mantle “radical individualist visions of

education”. Whereas most radical sociologist studies of education maintain a stubborn hope for education, the radical individualist trend tends to dismiss as oppressive all traditional forms of education. In place of education, they advocate learning on one’s own. Interestingly, this tradition shares many connections with the sociological tradition; in fact, part of my argument is that this tradition is a logical continuation of the sociological tradition. However, what distinguishes the radical individualist tradition as a distinct approach is its focus on ‘freedom’ rather than ‘authority’. Whereas sociological studies were satisfied with examining the influence of the dominant authority of education, this other tradition treats authority in education as an obvious fact and turns its attention to how freedom might relate to education. However, following from the dichotomous relationship between freedom and authority that is set up in the sociological critiques, they find no freedom within education itself. Freedom only exists in *independent* and *individual* learning. Thus, what we will see is that the radical individualist approach explicitly rejects all forms of education that involve more than individual, self-directed and self-focused learning.

Indeed, inspired by political-educational works like Ivan Illich’s *Deschooling Society*, John Holt’s *How Children Fail* and *Freedom and Beyond*, and J.T. Gatto’s *The Underground History of American Education*; novel’s like Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha* or Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, and most generally by the pervasiveness of American individualism, there is a thriving literature today that advocates learning for and by oneself. We can see this approach manifested in the ‘free schools’ or ‘open schools’ movement that created experimental schools such as *Summerhill* in the U.K., which in turn inspired many similar schools in the U.S., or, in slightly less radical form, the Great

Books program of St. John's College. As the co-founder of this program, Scott

Buchanan, writes,

Have you yet recognized that you are and always have been your own teacher? Amidst all the noise and furor about education in this country at present, I have yet to hear this question raised. But it is basic. Liberal education has as its end the free mind, and the free mind must be its own teacher.²⁴⁴

We can also see the influence of this approach in much of the alternative pedagogy literature, books on alternative approaches to parenting, and in much of the literature about home-schooling. In its most basic form, which is not necessarily the form it takes of those who inspired the movements, it encompasses three main arguments or beliefs: first, traditional schooling, or parenting, is the problem: it tells children they are stupid, it sucks their natural energy to learn by making them learn by rote, learn without purpose and learn within subjects and disciplines, and it forces them to behave and obey without questioning; second, human beings are natural learners and the purpose of education is to help children or adults maintain or recapture this natural passion for learning; and third, in order to accomplish this aim of education, 'schooling'—the authoritative teaching of what others think is important—should be minimized and a child's or adult's learning should begin with their own practical interests because this is more likely to reveal their true passions, and once these passions are discovered this will enable individuals to develop their true selves and natural calling and gifts. Given this, it is often recommended to leave schools or teachers out of education altogether, or, if one is to still have schools and teachers, their purpose must be to act as guides to help an individual child or adult develop and learn as freely and naturally as possible.

²⁴⁴ Scott Buchanan, "The Last Don Rag", *St. John's College*, last modified December 5th 2013, <http://www.stjohnscollege.edu/about/donrag.shtml>.

The literature surrounding these radical individualist movements of education often relies on the powerful sociological critiques of traditional schooling or parenting. For instance, Grace Llewellyn and Amy Silver's *Guerrilla Learning* begins with references to critiques of standardized testing, the obedience and compliance that is rewarded in schools,²⁴⁵ the "factory model" of education that schools embody,²⁴⁶ etc. With these critiques as the foundation, as it were, authors like Llewellyn and Silver then generally try to outline their understanding of what a better education would look like. The idea is that this "real education"²⁴⁷ will free students from "oppressive" schools and their "damaging ideology".²⁴⁸ As such, these radical individualist visions of education clearly promote the idea that there is a fundamental connection between a "real" education and some kind of emancipation. An education which encourages learners to discover their own passions and their own ability to learn on their own quite literally frees students from the bureaucratic and institutionalized forms of learning and from the kind of obedient self that traditional schools tend to produce. And an education emancipates insofar as it shows students that they can be their own teachers. As Llewellyn and Silver highlight, "The thing at stake in all this is freedom".²⁴⁹ If a person's education shows and encourages them to be independent learners and individuals who follow their own passions and interests, then their education is itself a particular kind of practice of freedom: a practice of freedom that emancipates students from the regular

²⁴⁵ Grace Llewellyn and Amy Silver, *Guerrilla Learning: How to Give Your Kids a Real Education With or Without School* (New York and Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 21.

²⁴⁶ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 24.

²⁴⁷ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 41.

²⁴⁸ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 31.

²⁴⁹ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 42.

practices of education (whether free or coercive) traditionally played out in schools and other societal institutions.

Unfortunately, however, like many of the sociological critiques, most of this literature perpetuates in its writings on education the stark dichotomy between freedom and authority. This can lead to, in my view, quite ridiculous conclusions for education and parenting. For example, in his work Carlo Ricci repeatedly states versions of the following: “I believe that children are among the last acceptably oppressed groups and that we need to advocate for their right” to be free from schools and adult interference.²⁵⁰ His idea is that any adult interference in education—whether it is through schooling, prescribing lessons, helping children solve problems—is oppressive, and we as adults must fight to free children from our bondage. Although not everyone who is a part of these movements goes this far in their calls for the emancipation of children from adult tyranny, most of the literature of this trend does share in this radical distinction between the bad authority of schools, teachers, adults, and the wishes of ‘others’ on the one hand, and the good freedom of the individual child or learner on the other.

Indeed, John Holt in his later work *Freedom and Beyond* tries to respond and offer a correction to this tendency in the movement to pose an individual’s freedom as fundamentally opposed to any role for the authority of others. As he explains the purpose of his book,

Naturally enough, some people, seeing around them the dreadful works of [coercive] authority, reject it altogether. But with it they too often reject, naturally but unwisely, all notions of competence, inspiration, leadership [...] The only alternative they seem to see to coercive authority

²⁵⁰ Carlo Ricci. “Unschooling: a Gentle Approach” *Cooperative Catalyst: Changing Education As We Speak* October 8, 2010, last modified December 5th, 2013, <http://coopcatalyst.wordpress.com/2010/10/08/unschooling-a-gentle-approach-guest-post-by-carlo-ricci/>.

is none at all. I have therefore tried to explore a little further the nature of freedom, so that we may better understand how people of varying ages and skills may live together and be useful to each other without some of them always pushing the others around.²⁵¹

Holt wants to insist that freedom doesn't mean the absence of authority altogether.

Instead, it means to have the freedom of choice and the freedom from fear within certain known and understood limits and constraints.²⁵² Moreover, as he conceives it, freedom of choice and freedom from fear can run up against these limits and constraints, and this can create tensions—like the tension between giving students the freedom to smash an easel in the classroom and the concern that if students are allowed to destroy an easel in the classroom they will prevent other students from being able to use the easel.²⁵³ According to Holt, such tensions between individual choice or freedom on the one hand, and concern for the well-being of the classroom or school as a whole on the other are unavoidable and often productive: “We must learn not to torment ourselves with the idea that arguments like this shouldn't go on all the time, that we ought to be able to find a way to get them settled. The tension is not a ‘problem’ and there is no ‘solution’ that will make it go away”.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, even with Holt's more nuanced understanding, the freedom that such an emancipatory education promises, even if it is limited by the needs of the school or community, is still imagined as the individual freedom of the child—the freedom of the child to choose on her own what she will learn and how she will learn it.

At the heart of this trend's approach, therefore, not to be displaced by even the most sophisticated analyses, is the sanctity of the individual child or learner. Although this trend's approach presents a practice of education that is emancipatory—that is itself a

²⁵¹ John Holt, *Freedom and Beyond* New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1972, 4.

²⁵² Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 20.

²⁵³ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 31.

²⁵⁴ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 41.

practice of freedom not simply an authoritative education for some future freedom—, this emancipation, this freedom, is only for the individual. Emancipation might take place in the context of an educational situation provided by the school, the family, etc., but in the end what is aimed for is a purely individual emancipation for the child, by the child. This emancipation means, as Llewellyn and Silver summarize, learning to take “responsibility for your own education”.²⁵⁵ And as Holt underlines, this must be done, when it comes down to it, alone: “no one can find his work, what he really wants to put all of himself into, when everything he does he is made to do by others. This kind of searching must be done freely or not at all”.²⁵⁶ As such, this insistence that educational emancipation must be of the individual, by the individual, raises the question of whether what we are dealing with here is still truly a practice of *education*. For if education includes not only learning but also *teaching*, and if teaching implies some relation of communication between two or more people, then education, thus defined, is not taking place if only a single individual is involved. An individual could be learning, but they are not being taught and therefore not participating in education. In fact, perhaps not surprisingly, in this trend there is a tendency to disparage ‘teaching’ tout-court; Holt, for instance, writes,

people, and above all children, may not only have much greater learning powers than we suspect, but also greater self-curing powers. Our task is to learn more about these powers and how we may create conditions in which they may have a chance to work. This is one of the things that children may be able to teach us, if we are not always busy teaching them.²⁵⁷

Teaching is a suspicious activity because it threatens to influence the natural passions of the learner; teaching may interfere in the ability of an individual to learn for, and by, himself. As Holt explains, teaching that tries to tempt students to learn something the

²⁵⁵ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 35.

²⁵⁶ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 63.

²⁵⁷ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 67-68.

teacher thinks is important “crosses some kind of boundary and becomes seduction, hidden coercion, do it to make me happy, do it because otherwise I’ll be unhappy and maybe even won’t like you”.²⁵⁸ Thus, according to this radical individualist perspective, education is generally defined as solely the learning of the individual on her own²⁵⁹, without any reference to relationships or communication with others. ‘Others’ are absent, removed or distant from ‘real’ education and this, I will argue, is a problem.

It is a problem, most basically, because it is not at all clear that education without any form of teaching is still education. To be sure, the insistence that education can happen outside of schools in ordinary life is an important correction that these movements often make to our cultural assumption that education only happens in schools²⁶⁰; but does this mean, in turn, that education has nothing to do with learning from or with other people? This focus on the individual as the site and agent of an emancipatory education also creates problems for those involved in this kind of education because of the interactions this focus encourages between people, and because of the political programme that such an understanding seems to encourage.

In relation to the first, this individualist focus is not only a problem because it encourages the kinds of “permissive” education and behaviour that conservative critics love to lambast.²⁶¹ More profoundly, it also seems to encourage a kind of alienation. Indeed, if all learning must be motivated by some authentic passion from within, this suggests that learning from others, or wanting to learn something because others are excited about it or think it is important, is somehow less free and less true. Learning

²⁵⁸ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 71.

²⁵⁹ See, for instance, Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 5.

²⁶⁰ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 36.

²⁶¹ Wynne, *Reclaiming Our Schools*, 6.

from, or because of, others, as Holt indicated above, suggests that you are being coerced. One might imagine that this idea could cause anxiety for many children or students who don't feel as though they have any obvious natural passions to follow or gifts to develop and would prefer to follow or imitate others. Moreover, this suspicion of the influence of others leads many teachers and parents to actively try to distance themselves from their children or students so as not to influence or coerce them. In fact, Holt himself describes A.S. Neill's, the founder of *Summerhill*, effort to not to make demands on students so as to give them their freedom; he praises,

Neill is so helpful and sustaining to these children, for this reason among others, they don't have to worry about him. They don't have to worry about what he thinks. They don't have to worry about disappointing him; he hasn't any great expectations for them, hasn't anything he wants them to become or do, so they can't disappoint him by not becoming or doing it. They don't have to worry about what he wants; he doesn't want anything, not from them.²⁶²

Holt clearly holds up Neill as the example to emulate for adults working with students or their children, and what he likes about Neill's relations with his students is his "benign indifference".²⁶³ Neill's students learn that he has no expectations for them and he does not care what they do or learn. Neill is not involved; he is indifferent. As such, perhaps it is not surprising that Holt also writes that a major problem that the free schools have had to contend with "is that many of the students are surprisingly unhappy".²⁶⁴ To be sure, Holt tries to explain this profound unhappiness of the students as being a result of them having one of their fundamental needs met—their freedom—and thus becoming able to think and worry about the problems in the rest of society.²⁶⁵ He describes how in most free schools there is "not much to do", how students become bored and disenchanted, and as a result crave something meaningful to do in school and more importantly in

²⁶² Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 21.

²⁶³ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 22.

²⁶⁴ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 46.

²⁶⁵ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 47-48.

society.²⁶⁶ Holt may be partially right in his analysis, but one cannot help but wonder whether what is also happening here, to explain the widespread unhappiness of students in these free schools, is that they are being cut off from others. Perhaps the individualist freedom that these children are being asked to practice in their ‘real education’ takes its toll by discouraging and inhibiting their ability to form attachments to others. If students are left alone and encouraged to only follow their own passions, perhaps there is “not much to do” because they are not introduced by others to a world outside themselves, and perhaps they are sad because the only attention they receive from others is a “benign indifference”.

On the second point, the individualist focus of these movements can lead to the promotion of libertarian or neo-liberal political policies. Although none of the founders of these movements intended their analyses to support right-wing political agendas, because of, in particular, the powerful critiques of schooling, their work has been used to support the attack on public schools and institutions. For instance, like their traditionalist counterparts, Llewellyn and Silver argue that education should be recognized as being properly “the province of the family”.²⁶⁷ And, following Illich, Holt argues that political time, energy and money should not be put into improving and reforming schools in order to help the poor, but instead put into encouraging education outside of schools.²⁶⁸ Although there is much of interest in Illich and Holt’s arguments against investing in schools as a way to help the poor, their arguments also lend themselves to conservative appropriation—the attack on public institutions that demands more private, individual

²⁶⁶ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 47.

²⁶⁷ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 43.

²⁶⁸ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 186.

initiatives.²⁶⁹ However, it is probably unfair to critique a movement simply because its ideas can be appropriated by those with a more reactionary agenda. More disturbing, is how the ideas of this movement easily slide into, or accommodate, themselves this promotion of creative, individual entrepreneurialism. Llewellyn and Silver's book contains many passages which show that their understanding of 'real education', although it aims to emancipate students from government-run institutions like schools, does not aim to emancipate students from a neo-liberal culture of individual entrepreneurialism, but instead sees itself as the form of education that is the most compatible with it and the American Dream. As they write,

Real education, in contrast [to traditional education in schools], prepares one to think critically and comprehensively, argue effectively, and find one's singular, irreplaceable calling in life and the skills to pursue it. It prepares us for self-reliance, not for dependency on others' approval, on social institutions, or on ready-made ideologies. Gatto and others believe that forced, systematic government-monopoly schooling was a conscious attempt to interfere with the thriving American experiment of self-reliance and individuality.²⁷⁰

Or again, as they argue later, to quell the fears of parents who worry about how well their children do in school because of the effect it could have on their capacity to get a job: "The United States is an embarrassment of riches where entrepreneurship rules, and any adult with energy and creativity and persistence and a little naive intelligence can figure out a way to make a livelihood".²⁷¹ Thus, it is clear that for those like Llewellyn and Silver the emancipatory education they hope to encourage shares in the same spirit of American individualism and entrepreneurship that also underlies neo-liberal policies. The individualism they promote is also the individualism of the new, self-reliant, creative, and innovative neo-liberal American subject.

²⁶⁹ Holt, *Freedom and Beyond*, 215.

²⁷⁰ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 26.

²⁷¹ Llewellyn and Silver, *Guerrilla Learning*, 46 .

Therefore, although the radical individualist trend in thinking about education and politics in North America distinguishes itself from the other trends because it offers a vision of an emancipatory education, the emancipatory education it promotes is troubling because of its individualism. Its extreme individualism raises the questions of whether the individual learning still counts as education, of whether it alienates human beings, and of whether it fosters a neo-liberal understanding of the self and society. As such, this approach presents many issues, most of which stem from viewing the problematic of freedom and authority in too stark terms. Indeed, this tradition of radical individualism seems to inherit a dichotomous view of freedom and authority from the tradition of sociological critiques, and then develops an understanding of ‘emancipatory education’ that is true to this dichotomy. An emancipatory education must not really be an education, but self-inspired and self-directed learning that is truly free from any authoritative influence of institutions or others.

However, not all radical and critical approaches polarize freedom and authority so extremely. There are those who are wary of the radical sociological tradition’s overemphasis on authority in education, and who try to counter rather than further this tendency. A good example of this is Henry Giroux. Giroux’s work is similar to much of the literature in the sociological critiques trend, but combines with their critiques of schools a commitment to thinking an emancipatory education that is not individualist. Thus, he takes a step back from the radical individualist dismissal of education, but tries not to focus purely on authority in education like the sociological critiques. Indeed, although Giroux wants to emancipate students from the traditional authority of schools and other societal institutions, unlike those in the radical individualist trend it is not

because schools and other societal institutions are a coercive authority ‘outside’ the individual. Instead, Giroux aims for an emancipation from the rationality and subjectivity that is encouraged in traditional schools and societal institutions, a rationality and subjectivity that promotes capitalism, patriarchy, the power of the elite, the marginalization of the poor, etc. The emancipation Giroux hopes for does not involve freeing individuals once and for all from ‘false’ forms of thinking or identity, but instead involves the production of an alternative way of thinking and being.

In his book *Theory and Resistance in Education*, for instance, he puts forward an argument for an “emancipatory rationality” that would be taught through a new kind of citizenship education.²⁷² This “emancipatory rationality” would contain analyses that would unravel “how the relationship among power, norms, and meaning function within a specific sociohistorical context to promote forms of self-misunderstanding as well as to support and sustain modes of structural domination”;²⁷³ and it would augment “its interest in self-reflection with social action designed to create the ideological and material conditions in which nonalienating and nonexploitative relationships exist”.²⁷⁴ In other words, Giroux wants to argue for a particular form of critique which simultaneously highlights how current modes of rationality and subjectivity harm people and society, and offers a way of thinking and acting that promotes opposition and challenge to these dominant modes.

Most of Giroux’s book, however, is not devoted to exploring this ‘emancipatory rationality’ itself, but to showing why it is necessary. Most of his chapters are dedicated

²⁷² Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 190-191.

²⁷³ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 190.

²⁷⁴ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 191.

to critiques of the dominant analyses on the left of schools and schooling, particularly the debates about hidden curriculum, theories of reproduction, and literacy. His general thesis is that radical theorists “have made important contributions to unravelling the relations between schools and dominant society. But in the long run they have failed to escape either from the crushing pessimism or from the inability to link in a dialectical fashion the issue of agency and structure”.²⁷⁵ Giroux hopes to improve what he sees as overly functionalist or structural analyses of schools with an argument for how schools can also be sites of resistance.²⁷⁶ To do this, Giroux draws in particular from the Frankfurt School in order to find “a theoretical foundation upon which to develop a critical theory of education”.²⁷⁷ More specifically, he is interested in reinvigorating concepts of ideology and culture so as to make his case for his ‘emancipatory rationality’ and its promotion within a radical pedagogy.²⁷⁸ Giroux hopes that concepts of ideology and culture can be used not only in a negative manner—for instance, to show how the dominant way of thinking and acting that is cultivated in traditional schools sustains the interests of the elite—but also in a sense that is positive—for instance, to point towards how alternative ways of thinking and acting can be produced by teachers and students in schools.²⁷⁹ In other words, he wants to emphasize how ideology and culture can be empowering, as well as inhibiting and oppressive.

As such, Giroux is clearly not thinking about his new citizenship education within a strict dichotomy between freedom and authority. The ‘freedom’ he wants to see radical pedagogy promote is obviously fundamentally tied to a particular form of critique—

²⁷⁵ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 235.

²⁷⁶ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 60.

²⁷⁷ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 7.

²⁷⁸ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 150.

²⁷⁹ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 154.

‘emancipatory rationality’—and a particular form of subjectivity—a subject who is not afraid “to display civic courage”.²⁸⁰ Thus, unlike many in the radical individualist tradition, Giroux does not conceive of his new citizenship education’s form of ‘freedom’ as beyond authority altogether; his radical education is quite obviously firmly grounded in an authoritative vision of the world, but one that is emancipatory, rather than conservative like Gutmann’s. Indeed, whereas Amy Gutmann wants citizenship education to maintain and reproduce the liberal-democratic socio-political authority of the day, Giroux wants citizenship education that promotes critiques of the socio-political authority of the day and resistance to it. The question is: what form does this emancipatory authority take for Giroux?

We have already noted the forms that Gutmann’s liberal-democratic authority over education takes: first, its aim of conscious social reproduction of liberal-democratic society; second, the liberal-democratic processes through which the contents and practices of education are decided; third, the principles—nonrepression and nondiscrimination—through which liberal-democratic norms are enforced; and finally, the teaching of deliberative reasoning—a liberal-democratic form of ‘independent’ or critical thinking. In contrast, for Giroux the emancipatory authority he desires for education is not already associated with widely accepted practices and institutions. Instead, it springs more directly from the kind of critique, or ‘emancipatory rationality’, that he outlines. In other words, the main form that Giroux’s emancipatory authority takes is critique itself. To be sure, he hopes that once students learn to critique, or learn to think according to an ‘emancipatory rationality’, that they will then create practices of

²⁸⁰ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 201.

struggle and resistance. However, these practices of struggle and resistance are clearly seen to stem or follow from the new way of thinking and understanding the world. As he writes, a radical pedagogy

points to the need to identify the tacit messages embodied in the day-to-day routines of the school experience, and to uncover the emancipatory or repressive interests these routines serve. It also suggests developing a mode of critique that comprehends the forces that mediate between the structural relations of schooling and their lived effects. Students bring different histories to school; these histories are embedded in class, gender, and race interests that shape their needs and behaviour, often in ways they don't understand or that work against their own interests. To work with working-class students, for instance, under the purported impetus of a radical pedagogy would mean not only changing their consciousness, but simultaneously developing social relations that sustain and are comparable with the radical needs in which such a consciousness would have to be grounded in order to be meaningful.²⁸¹

Thus, Giroux's 'emancipatory rationality' is the source of authority in his new citizenship education. It is a new mode of critique which will offer students "an analysis that explores the often-overlooked complex relations among knowledge, power, ideology, class and economics",²⁸² and whose point is to help students identify the "interests" that lie behind different understandings of the world, and in turn develop and extend the understandings of the world that will enable them to resist oppression and domination.

Given that for Giroux the authority that guides his radical education stems from the form of rationality or critique he wants to teach, it is clear that, unlike Gutmann, Giroux does not expect his 'emancipatory rationality' to be free or independent from the authority that presides over his radical education. Whereas Gutmann hoped to avoid a strictly dogmatic defense of a liberal-democratic authority for education by insisting that students themselves would be taught critical thinking—deliberative reasoning—and would thus be able to escape from a potential democratic tyranny by the adult majority who decide what they must learn, Giroux does not trouble himself over his dogmatic

²⁸¹ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 149-150.

²⁸² Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 170.

promotion of a way of thinking that is expressly politically committed. He is conscious and upfront about the fact that he is promoting a very specific form of independent thought—‘emancipatory rationality’—and that this form of independent thought has political aims. He does not pretend that his ‘emancipatory rationality’ is free from, or can critique, the authority he hopes will guide education; indeed, as was already pointed out, the authority he hopes will guide education *is* ‘emancipatory rationality’ itself. Therefore, Giroux is more obvious about his dogmatism than Gutmann, and he does not worry about his ‘emancipatory rationality’ being independent from the radical understanding of the world he hopes his new citizenship education will promote. Giroux is more concerned that his ‘emancipatory rationality’ be independent from the dominant ways of thinking and being in society today, than it allow independence within its own vision.

So, then, like Gutmann, Giroux’s argument for a radical education is somewhat concerning because it fails to promote any free-thinking that is ‘free’ from its own authoritative vision. What also seems to be a problem, is that Giroux’s argument for a new citizenship education guided by an ‘emancipatory rationality’ does not simply involve the introduction of a new mode of critique, but involves teachers and students learning, understanding, accepting an entirely new view of the world, as outlined by Giroux himself. Although Giroux praises the Frankfurt School for recognizing “the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions”, his own prescriptions for a radical education become quite doctrinaire.²⁸³ For instance, Giroux argues that a new form of radical citizenship education would require, after defining new aims that made changing

²⁸³ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 8.

society the goal, changing the consciousness of teachers.²⁸⁴ Giroux outlines the many things teachers must learn and understand before they could teach students a new form of citizenship: “to think critically about the nature of their beliefs”,²⁸⁵ to “view the evolution of schools and school practices as part of a historical dynamic in which different forms of knowledge, social structures, and belief systems are seen as concrete expressions of class-specific interests”,²⁸⁶ to be “better informed citizens”,²⁸⁷ to analyse school knowledge “to determine to what degree its form and content represent the unequal presentation of the cultural capital of minorities of class and color”,²⁸⁸ “to understand not only the linkages that exist between the hidden and formal curricula, but also the complex connections that exist between both curriculum and the principles that structure similar modes of knowledge and social relationships in the larger society”,²⁸⁹ and finally to analyse “power and transformation”.²⁹⁰ To be frank, no light task! It is not simply that teachers must be taught a new mode of critique, they must also become extremely well-versed in a particular way of analysing and understanding the world in order to then be qualified to teach it to students. They must become experts in ‘emancipatory rationality’, one imagines, by being taught by those already enlightened like Giroux.

Thus, it is quite hard to see how Giroux’s understanding of emancipatory education is not simply a re-education from above. To be sure, Giroux argues that when it comes to classroom practices students’ participation and appropriation of their own experiences and histories must be encouraged, however these more participatory forms of

²⁸⁴ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 194.

²⁸⁵ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 194.

²⁸⁶ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 195.

²⁸⁷ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 196.

²⁸⁸ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 197.

²⁸⁹ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 198.

²⁹⁰ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 199.

education are only meant to prepare students to “make a leap to the theoretical and begin to examine the truth value of their meanings and perceptions, particularly as they relate to the dominant rationality”.²⁹¹ Once students are ready for this ‘theoretical leap’, they then must begin to “learn about the structural and ideological forces that influence and restrict their lives”.²⁹² Therefore, Giroux’s endorsement of a new emancipatory rationality for citizenship education is a problem because it is dogmatic and because of how much knowledge, understanding, and analysis is required in order to be considered prepared or educated in this new form of rationality. Giroux’s ‘emancipatory rationality’ clearly requires that teachers and then students understand and know a lot more than simply how to analyze a situation differently. In other words, it is not a ‘simple’ mode of critique that Giroux wants to dogmatically assert, but a form of rationality that comes saturated with a long history, and with a complex understanding of the world. And, because his ‘emancipatory rationality’ is so saturated, it is nearly impossible for Giroux to avoid advocating a re-education from above. Intellectual experts like him must pass on the intricacies of his ‘emancipatory rationality’ to teachers in general, who must then pass it on to students. As such, one could imagine that this form of re-education in ‘emancipatory rationality’ could become not only top-down, but authoritarian: you must understand ‘emancipatory rationality’ in the *right way*, in order to be able to teach it *properly* to students. Thus, unlike Gutmann who can rely on the ‘common sense’ of the liberal-democratic vision and thereby can avoid the need to re-educate so obviously from above, the complexity and specificity of Giroux’s radical education seems to necessitate

²⁹¹ Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 203.

²⁹² Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education*, 203.

top-down education, even if this education is done in a manner which attempts to be participatory and empathetic.

We have identified, therefore, in Giroux's *Theory and Resistance in Education* troubling tendencies again reminiscent of the Platonic schema. In fact, Rancière's critiques of Plato are particularly damning of Giroux's analysis because they help us identify within it the recurring pattern of preserving the superiority of the intellectual and their knowledge. Moreover, although Giroux does not perpetuate like most of the radical tradition a dichotomous understanding of the relationship between freedom and authority in education, he returns to a position of worrying dogmatism. Authority and freedom are not opposed, but this seems to mean that authority governs and controls the desired practice of freedom. In a similar manner to Gutmann, 'free-thinking' seems to be entirely defined by a specific and detailed authority—an emancipatory rationality. The freedom within 'free-thinking', which Weber, Arendt and Adorno all insisted was so important, is greatly circumscribed by a commitment to a particular vision of the world. Thus, although the radical tradition of thinking about politics and education in North America offers some powerful critiques of educational institutions and practices, it does little to further our understanding of emancipatory education. Many of these radical analyses give us a more complex and nuanced understanding of the problem of authority in education—including the problem of the authority of the teacher—but there is little to go on if we want to imagine what a more emancipatory and democratic education might look like.

Intriguing Exceptions:

There are a few thinkers who have written about education in the North American context, however, who do open up the problematic of freedom and authority in more subtle and interesting ways. The two thinkers I have in mind—Allan Bloom and John Dewey—stand apart from those we examined thus far. Both Bloom and Dewey’s reflections on education are intriguing partly because they are so different from the bulk of the literature concerned with politics and education in North America. These thinkers’ reflections are also interesting, however, because they have been extremely influential. Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind* provoked a great deal of commentary, critique and attack when it was published in the 1987, and Dewey is widely considered to be one of the founding fathers of ‘progressive’ educational thought. For us, however, what is most fascinating about these thinkers’ reflections on education is that they both depict practices of education which are shaped by an authoritative commitment, but still involve meaningful freedom. Unlike thinkers like Gutmann and Giroux, neither Bloom nor Dewey advocate an education that is completely saturated by a particular authority; they insist upon the freedom and openness that must exist within education. In this sense, their writings on education portray a much more complex and subtle understanding of the paradox of education. They certainly do not approach freedom and authority as a dichotomy, but neither do they collapse freedom entirely into a particular authority. It is this achievement that I would like to highlight in this chapter. Beyond this praise for Bloom and Dewey’s insights, however, I will also try to show why their analyses of the paradox of education are ultimately unsatisfactory.

First, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* is a notoriously conservative text. And, he no doubt has some things in common with conservative critics who want to re-establish an American or Canadian narrative, or who want to encourage the maintenance of a traditional curriculum for education. However, what distinguishes him from mainstream conservative critics like Edward Wynne is that Bloom does not see the ultimate political task of education to be the training of future citizens in certain values, or, as he puts it, "in the education of the democratic personality".²⁹³ The purpose of education is rather to attempt to answer the question, "What is Man?", not to cultivate a particular character.²⁹⁴ According to Bloom, any kind of values approach to education—even those with a conservative message—cannot avoid indoctrinating students into what he variously names, "value relativism", American "nihilism with a happy ending", or, "the openness of indifference", etc.²⁹⁵ Moreover, he argues that this value relativism, or blind acceptance that everyone has their own truth, is a consequence of democracy itself: the consequence of the "insatiable appetite for freedom to live as one pleases".²⁹⁶ What Bloom suggests is that if this appetite for freedom is not held in check by norms, narratives and institutions—particularly educational ones that, for instance, tell a story of America, its founding and its purpose—²⁹⁷ then disintegration ensues leading to a terrifying "conformism" and "drab diversity" of the lowest common denominator.²⁹⁸ In fact, most of *The Closing of the American Mind* is an attempt to show how this tendency towards an egalitarian relativism has proliferated in philosophy and popular thinking, and

²⁹³ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 27.

²⁹⁴ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 21.

²⁹⁵ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 141, 147 and 41.

²⁹⁶ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 28.

²⁹⁷ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 29 and 55.

²⁹⁸ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 34.

has begun to corrupt various aspects of American society, most worryingly the University.

Indeed, Bloom is quite clear that his project in this book is to highlight the intellectual origins of this trend of liberal, nihilist relativism and show how it has infected most people's thinking. One could also describe his task in the *Closing of the American Mind* as the attempt to detail the current form of ideological hegemony that has settled over liberal democratic America. Thus, part of what makes Bloom's analysis so intriguing is that it poses itself against a particular modern, liberal variation of the problematic of freedom and authority. In so doing, it challenges many of the common assumptions that frame our thinking about politics and education. However, as we shall see, the inspiration for this challenge comes from Bloom's admiration of Plato. Therefore, although his analysis at points is refreshing, it is also deeply disturbing for many of the same reasons Rancière's critiques highlighted about Plato's.

To elaborate: Bloom's analysis offers an explanation of the character of the *authority* that has come to preside over America since the 1950s—it is a way of thinking and behaving that encourages openness at all costs, but an openness, according to Bloom, that is really a closedness to thinking and learning anything new.²⁹⁹ In this sense, then, he shares something with Giroux and others in the radical tradition who critique the status quo. He wants to battle the authority and dogmas of the day: “the charms that make us comfortable with the present”.³⁰⁰ And, also like Giroux, Bloom argues that education has a significant role to play in such a battle. A university education can offer a student,

²⁹⁹ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 41.

³⁰⁰ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 42.

four years of freedom to discover himself—a space between the intellectual wasteland he has left behind and the inevitable dreary professional training that awaits him after the baccalaureate. In this short time he must learn that there is a great world beyond the little one he knows, experience the exhilaration of it and digest enough of it to sustain himself in the intellectual deserts he is destined to traverse. He must do this, that is, if he is to have any hope of a higher life. These are the charmed years when he can, if he so chooses, become anything he wishes and when he has the opportunity to survey his alternatives, not merely those current in his time or provided by careers, but those available to him as a human being.³⁰¹

Education can be an experience, in other words, of emancipation: an emancipation from the dominant authority of the day, which confines and narrows the possibilities of existence for most people. The University can provide a dizzying and erotic initiation into a higher life.³⁰² Great professors, with the help of great books, open innocent students to the powerful desire to know. And, in so doing, education offers a select group quite literally “the thrill of liberation” from common opinion and existence.³⁰³

However, unlike Giroux, Bloom is not concerned with the dominant authority, or the conformism of common opinion, because ordinary people are being duped or harmed by it, but because this conformism threatens the University—the institution that forms and safeguards the few who are capable of thinking freely. In fact, Bloom does not expect the ordinary world outside the University, and the ordinary people who inhabit it, to be anything but zombies in an “intellectual wasteland”. What worries him is the passing of this homogenizing culture into the University. In particular, he is concerned by the value relativism manifested in specialization, professionalization, political correctness, women, blacks, affirmative action programs, empty scientism or social-scientism, etc. These flame the attack on great professors and great books. Then the education that formerly rescued a few souls, or provided the four years of freedom described above for those capable, disappears. If this is allowed to happen, Bloom argues, especially in a

³⁰¹ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 336.

³⁰² Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 136.

³⁰³ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 43.

democracy, the “repository of the regime’s own highest faculty and principle”, true openness and independence of thought, is threatened.³⁰⁴ Or, as he dramatically phrases it: all the “wonderful results of the theoretical life collapse back into the primal slime from which they cannot re-emerge”.³⁰⁵

For the purpose of the University, after all, is to detect and educate the elite few who are capable of free-thinking; as he writes,

Most students will be content with what our present considers relevant; others will have a spirit of enthusiasm that subsides as family and ambition provide them with other objects of interest; a small number will spend their lives in an effort to be autonomous. It is for these last, especially, that liberal education exists. They become the models for the use of the noblest human faculties and hence are benefactors to all of us, more for what they are than for what they do. Without their presence (and, one should add, without their being respectable), no society—no matter how rich or comfortable, no matter how technically adept or full of tender sentiments—can be called civilized.³⁰⁶

As such, the University, if it is uncorrupted, is not only the place where the elite few capable of thinking independently can be educated in the best questions and answers of the great minds of Western Civilization, but it is a place that shelters “the higher life” itself—the community of great thinkers.³⁰⁷ The University, then, is the haven for the few; it provides an aristocratic community of men who are capable of true friendship and openness, and also the only community where meaningful freedom and equality are possible. Thus, although Bloom shares Giroux’s contempt for the dominant authority of the day, he is only troubled by this authority because it has not stayed in its proper place and threatens to overrun the University and the possibility of autonomous thinking that this educational institution preserves. Bloom has no desire to throw the shackles of conformism off everyone. Bloom is, in fact, provokingly clear that he thinks only a few

³⁰⁴ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 254.

³⁰⁵ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 245.

³⁰⁶ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 21.

³⁰⁷ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 382.

elite men are capable of liberation. Despite this overt elitism, however, Giroux and Bloom's penultimate understanding of an emancipatory education could not be more similar: the many lead their lives under the sway of the dominant authority of the day, and the lucky/better few, through education, are introduced to true freedom. Both thinkers share, therefore, a vision and a commitment to an education that emancipates the few.

However, what distinguishes Bloom most from Giroux, beyond his explicit aristocratic sentiments, is that the emancipation he envisions does not necessitate a conversion to a clearly defined view of the world. He insists that the great professors and great books of a proper University education open questions up for the select few, rather than introduce them to the reality of social, political and economic forces. This educational tradition "provides models of discussion on a uniquely high level" and encourages "an atmosphere of free inquiry".³⁰⁸ Instead of imagining that to free people's thought one must teach them how to think according to 'deliberative reasoning' or 'emancipatory rationality', Bloom assumes that other great men's efforts to think will provoke young great men to think. In other words, I would maintain that Bloom's understanding of an emancipatory education allows for more meaningful free-thinking within its bounds. For, it is not as if Bloom's emancipatory education is completely free from authority either. He very clearly advocates a particular authority for his emancipatory education: the authority of the Great Books of Western Civilization. It just happens that this authority is less saturated, less closed to debate than the authority promoted by either Gutmann or Giroux. Given this, Bloom's description of an

³⁰⁸ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 244.

emancipatory education offers a more sophisticated understanding of the problematic of freedom and authority. Bloom does not pretend that an emancipatory education is divorced from authority, but neither does the authority he promotes completely circumscribe and control the aimed for emancipation. According to Bloom at least, initiation into the Great Books of Western Civilization does not give one answers to how the world is, but lets loose free-thinking.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Bloom's analysis shows one way an authority might frame education without quashing free-thinking, Bloom's overall vision of education is still deeply unsatisfactory. First, although the tradition of Great Books might provide an emancipatory educational experience for some, it seems unimaginative, not to mention racist, to assume that openness in education can *only* be achieved by teaching a select Western canon. Are the Great Books of Western Civilization the only possible authority in education that is meaningfully open to questions and debate? Second, given its long history, this tradition of Great Books risks becoming saturated with 'correct understandings' of the debates and questions, so that it too will repeat the dogmatism that Gutmann and Giroux's visions of education displayed. Third, and finally, Bloom's vision of emancipatory education is founded on a separation between the few and the many. The few may be members of a kind of community of equals, but they are supported by a society of ignorant and industrious masses. As Bloom declares, "I thought and think that society is ministerial to the university, and I bless a society that tolerates and supports an eternal childhood for some, a childhood whose playfulness can in turn be a blessing to society".³⁰⁹ In other words, the freedom of thought enjoyed by the emancipated few is

³⁰⁹ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 245.

made possible, according to Bloom's schematic, because of the labours and respectful acceptance of the many. This particular reinvigoration of Plato is obviously troubling for those of us who might be interested in the possibility of a democratic emancipatory education. Beyond its self-satisfied elitism, what is worrying is the insistence that emancipation is linked to the privileges of an aristocratic life and sphere. Is emancipation really only possible for the few with the natural gifts of intelligence and the social gifts of wealth and leisure?

In the North American context, the work of John Dewey is similarly unique. However, unlike Bloom, Dewey was not interjecting his thoughts on politics and education into the debates we have described in previous sections. Writing between 1884-1949 Dewey's own context was obviously quite different; however, his writings have had a great influence on thinking about education, in North America especially. In particular, he is famous in educational circles for his critiques of formal techniques of education, his claim that students learn best through doing an activity rather than learning about it abstractly, and his call for integrating the curriculum of learning not only between different subjects, but with the experiences, interests, and needs of the particular student and society. Unfortunately, however, those committed to progressive or radical education have tended to adopt these insights as mantras for reform, rather than paying as much attention to Dewey's overall educational vision. For, again, what is most interesting for us about Dewey's analyses of education is that his overall educational vision avoids the common approaches for tackling the paradox of education.

In fact, his educational vision is more sophisticated partly because, like Bloom, his analyses are not motivated by a desire to 'solve' the problem of authority in

education. Neither Dewey nor Bloom aim to discover an authority that is compatible with freedom, as do Gutmann or Giroux, nor do they aim to escape the oppression of authority like many in the radical traditions. Rather, they both accept that authority in education is obvious and inevitable, but instead of worrying about what form it should take, they concentrate on a particular practice of freedom that education can allow. Indeed, we saw with Bloom that his analysis was not devoted to a justification for the authority of the Great Books of Western civilization and how it would not meaningfully limit anyone's freedom. He simply asserted that this authority over education allowed for emancipation—because of its association, no doubt, with philosophy and truth—and focused his efforts on explaining and demonstrating the ways this emancipation took place. He detailed the glories of a liberal education, and lambasted those forces that threatened this tradition. In this sense, his analysis is motivated by an interest in 'freedom' rather than 'authority', and this contrasts starkly with the main approaches we examined above. For, as now may be clear, the main approaches to politics and education in North America today are not only framed by the problematic of freedom and authority, but are more specifically preoccupied with wanting to resolve the paradox of education. And to resolve this paradox, it is assumed that the problem of authority must be dealt with in some way: either by finding a good authority to govern education, or by attempting to find an education that largely escapes authority. What Bloom and Dewey share in distinction from these main trends is that their analyses are driven by a passion for freedom, rather than a preoccupation with authority. They accept the need for authority in education, they have no illusion over the neutrality of this authority, and they

desire to show and investigate the practice of freedom in education that can exist within the bounds of this authority.

Furthermore, I contend that it is their interest in the possibilities of a particular practice of freedom that leads them to present a more nuanced version of the paradox of education. Bloom's and Dewey's analyses of education highlight the specific ways freedom can exist within the limits of a particular authority, and how this freedom, when exercised well, can also shape and influence this particular authority. Their understanding of the relationship between freedom and authority in education is thus more complex. They emphasize the dynamism that exists in an educational practice between freedom and authority, because they are fascinated by the promises of freedom that exist within it. Whereas authors like Giroux and Gutmann focus on authority and thereby end up highlighting the dogmatism of their vision of education, Bloom's and Dewey's analyses illuminate the openness that exists within a particular practice of education. In this sense, their analyses of politics and education are much more hopeful, as well as sophisticated.

Dewey's reflections on education are even more hopeful than Bloom's. For Dewey approached questions of education at least in part out of an interest in social reform, rather than from a concern that his prized form of education was under attack.³¹⁰ In *Democracy and Education*, for instance, his analysis of education seems to be motivated by a desire to outline how education might be more complementary to modern, democratic society.³¹¹ Instead of sustaining an educational system that is hierarchical, detached and formal, Dewey argues that education could be reformed to better promote

³¹⁰ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 257.

³¹¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 292.

the progressiveness and openness that he sees as characteristic of democracy.³¹² The problem is simply that current educational practices, at least at the time Dewey was writing, were better suited for an older, more aristocratic and hierarchical form of society. The reason this mismatch between education and society is a concern, is that education is a primarily conservative, reproductive activity. It is the activity through which a society sustains itself, by passing along the wisdom and knowledge of the old to the young.³¹³ In our modern society, much of this educational transmission takes place in formal institutions of learning, and it is these schools that employ methods and approaches to learning that are out of step with the needs of a democratic society. They encourage a “servility” and “intellectual subjection” that is better suited to “fitting the masses into a society where the many are not expected to have aims or ideas of their own, but to take orders from the few set in authority”.³¹⁴ In other words, schools are set up to reproduce what Dewey considers to be an outmoded form of society.

It is also important to stress, however, that for Dewey not all educational transmission takes place in schools; he argues that it is mostly carried out in shared activity and communication.³¹⁵ A child learns acceptable eating behaviour, for example, by eating with others: while eating, others correct and direct her, and she imitates others’ eating etiquette. The child learns both as a participant in the community and as a trainee under social control and direction. In fact, part of what is so interesting about Dewey’s thought about education is this insistence on a more benevolent understanding of “social control”, or, in our terms, authority. He writes,

³¹² Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 309.

³¹³ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 3.

³¹⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 293.

³¹⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 9.

we must carefully avoid a meaning sometimes read into the term 'control'. It is sometimes assumed, explicitly or unconsciously, that an individual's tendencies are naturally purely individualistic or egoistic, and thus antisocial. Control then denotes the process by which he is brought to subordinate his natural impulses to public or common ends. Since, by conception, his own nature is quite alien to this process and opposes it rather than helps it, control has in this view a flavour of coercion or compulsion about it. Systems of government and theories of the state have been built upon this notion, and it has seriously affected educational ideas and practices. But there is no ground for any such view. Individuals are certainly interested, at times, in having their own way, and their own way may go contrary to the ways of others. But they are also interested, and chiefly interested upon the whole, in entering into activities of others and taking part in conjoint and cooperative doings. Otherwise, no such things as community would be possible.³¹⁶

Thus, for Dewey, it is a mistake to imagine social control or authority as an oppressive and coercive external force. It is rather, or at least primarily, the basis of all shared meaning, all language, all community. It is a "way of *understanding* objects, events, and acts which enables one to participate effectively in associated activities".³¹⁷ Anticipating Foucault, Dewey underscores that this understanding is mostly communicated indirectly through "the nature of the situations in which the young take part".³¹⁸ In participating in a joint activity, the young come to understand the social meanings of this activity, and thereby come to have an interest in this activity. In this way, social meanings and control are internalized: the young person becomes a member of the community. And Dewey claims, to "achieve this internal control through identity of interest and understanding is the business of education".³¹⁹

Nonetheless, Dewey also argues that education is reconstructive.³²⁰ As participants in joint activities, the young not only internalize social meanings and control, but in turn take part in shaping social meanings and control. They are also agents who reaffirm, rebuild, or reform. Indeed, Dewey claims that what distinguishes "progressive" societies is that this educational reconstruction is considered to be more open to evolution

³¹⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 23.

³¹⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 35.

³¹⁸ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 39.

³¹⁹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 39.

³²⁰ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 74.

and adaptation.³²¹ There is an effort to “extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement”.³²² In progressive societies there is less pressure to conform to the tradition of the way things have been always done, and thus education has more leeway in its reconstructive efforts. For Dewey, the openness and adaptability that is essential in progressive societies is exemplified by the scientific method: ideas are tested by experience, and revised accordingly. Science perfects the natural human capacity to reflect and learn from experience; and, he insists, “without initiation into the scientific spirit one is not in possession of the best tools which humanity has so far devised for effectively directed reflection.”³²³ Therefore, it is the scientific spirit that must be communicated and practiced in education if society is to be open and progressive. As Dewey writes, “the problem of an educational use of science is then to create an intelligence pregnant with belief in the possibility of the direction of human affairs by itself. The method of science engrained through education in habit means emancipation from rule of thumb and from the routine generated by rule of thumb procedure”.³²⁴ In other words, the scientific spirit allows more freedom in the practice of reconstruction that is education. It encourages students and teachers alike to reform their aims or practices. It encourages agency. It assumes an open-endedness that leaves space for change. As Dewey asserts, it is “the organ of general social progress”.³²⁵

Thus, Dewey sets up his analysis in *Democracy and Education* to show us the possibility of an education that is compatible with modern democracy. In his vision, this

³²¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 76.

³²² Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 79.

³²³ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 183.

³²⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 215.

³²⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 221.

education should combine the authority of shared activity and community feeling, with a freedom to reshape the ends of community life. As he summarizes, his analysis “was seen to imply the ideal of a continuous reconstruction or reorganizing of experience, of such a nature as to increase its recognized meaning or social content, and as to increase the capacity of individuals to act as directive guardians of this reorganization.”³²⁶ What is striking about this vision for us is that it clearly embodies a complex understanding of the relationship between freedom and authority. On the one hand, Dewey argues that we should understand authority, or social control, as an affirmative, communal force. More than any other thinker we have examined, he underscores the necessity and importance of authority in education and for community life. It is presented in almost an entirely positive light. And yet, on the other hand, he maintains a notion of emancipation from authority. Freedom is not only experienced through the medium of social control, but also through a “liberation” from social control.³²⁷ Education can hope to “free the capacities [...] for fuller exercise, to purge them from their grossness, and to furnish objects which make their activity more productive of meaning”.³²⁸ The way Dewey tries to smooth over this apparent tension between a positive understanding of authority and a commitment to the idea of emancipation is by insisting on a non-destructive, non-revolutionary understanding of this emancipation. As we have seen, he imagines emancipation as continuous and as contained within a shared, communal practice of experimental education. Emancipation does not involve a dramatic break with what came before, but is imagined as a harmonious process of evolution and progress. In this way, Dewey hopes to hold together a positive understanding of social authority with an idea of the liberating

³²⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 309.

³²⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 70.

³²⁸ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 17.

potential of education. He thus presents the most harmonious understanding of the problematic of freedom and authority that we have seen yet.

There is much to admire about this effort. First, he reminds his readers that authority is what makes human community possible. This celebration of authority is a welcome antidote to so many of the purely negative portrayals of authority in both radical and liberal traditions. It calls our attention to the joys and necessities of communal life. Second, his reluctance to do away with the notion of emancipation, despite its uneasy relationship with his positive portrayal of authority, speaks to a commitment to change. Dewey seems genuinely concerned that education, and society in general, be open to change. Finally, his commitment to democracy is more profound than most other thinkers we have examined, and more intertwined with his understanding of education. According to Dewey, democracy is more than a form of government, “it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”³²⁹ Given this, democratic life is made possible by, and manifested in, education. Though guided by adults and teachers, education is a shared experience where both teachers and students participate in learning. There is thus a certain kind of equality expressed in the joint activity of education. Moreover, Dewey argues against the divisions that characterize most visions of education: the divisions between theory and practice, abstract and concrete, the higher arts and vocational skills are all hierarchical vestiges of an education suited for a stratified society.³³⁰ Democracy requires that everyone be initiated into the scientific spirit—which must happen through education—and also that these false divisions of education be broken down so that all can participate in work, learning, and

³²⁹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 83.

³³⁰ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 251.

leisure.³³¹ Democracy requires that all learning is available to everyone, so that everyone is equally capable of directing human affairs.³³² And, if everyone participates in the direction of human affairs, then everyone can learn from this experience and people will be more open to improvement and change. Thus, in sharp contrast to the Platonic tradition, Dewey understands democracy to be educative and education to be democratic. Both are a communal enterprise of experimentation and learning.

However, despite these promising aspects of Dewey's analysis, his desire to harmonize and smooth over all tension is also unsettling. He certainly presents a practice of education that exhibits some openness and freedom, but he also seems wary of admitting to any conflict. But if he senses a need to maintain an idea of emancipation, does this not suggest that some forms of social control are oppressive? Is there no friction within a community? No disputes over change? Put simply, his theory seems too determinedly optimistic. Therefore, although much of Dewey's analysis is more attractive than Bloom's, his commitment to harmony and consensus downplay conflict, and thereby also the potentially radical nature of emancipation. Whereas Bloom maintained an understanding of emancipation as revolutionary, or as a dramatic break with convention, Dewey limits emancipation to a process of gradual, seamless change. Although Dewey still insists that this process entails "liberation", he imagines liberation as less transformative, less profound than Bloom does. In this sense, then, Dewey's commitment to a more harmonious understanding of the relationship between freedom and authority hems in possibilities of change. Change must not disrupt and must fit in with what came before.

³³¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 246.

³³² Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 186.

Moreover, although Bloom is the one who calls for a return to Plato, and although in most regards Dewey's analysis of politics and education is profoundly anti-Platonic, at the heart of his vision is still the Platonic hope for a harmonious blending between social institutions and the people. Dewey shares in what Rancière identifies as one of our most influential Platonic inheritances: a desire to create "a political order that is homogeneous to the mode of life of a society".³³³ Although his vision of a democratic education and educational democracy is appealing in many ways, his determination to imagine this seamless coexistence is also what leads Dewey to moderate his understanding of emancipation and reign in the possibilities for change. It is Dewey's continued affiliation with this particular Platonic inheritance that makes his analysis ultimately disappointing.

Despite these limitations, both Bloom and Dewey's analyses of education are provocative and refreshing. They manage to refocus our attention away from the common preoccupations that follow from how the paradox of education is generally addressed in North America today. They also depict practices of education where authority is acknowledged yet meaningful freedom seems to exist. These are promising departures. However, as we have noted, there are serious limitations to their analyses for those of us who are interested in the possibilities of emancipatory and democratic education. This is in part because Bloom and Dewey's political thinking about education is still framed by a problematic of freedom and authority. Although they do offer refreshing formulations of the paradox of education, because they do not offer an alternative problematic the issues that haunt the problematic of freedom and authority continue to lurk in their analyses and can easily resurface to pull our thinking about education back into the familiar orbit. In

³³³ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 64.

contrast, it is precisely this transition away from a problematic of freedom and authority that I think we can detect in Rancière's writings, and it is this transition that we will examine in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Rancière's Shift to Equality

We've have seen in previous chapters how our political thinking about education is dogged by certain problems that seem to follow, at least in part, from the fact that our analyses are framed by questions of freedom and authority. Although on the one hand this frame illuminates a paradox of education that it seems essential for political thinkers of education to address, on the other hand our thought and our practices of education seem plagued by authoritarian, antidemocratic, and even antisocial consequences. Given this, the question seems to be: is it possible to retain the idea of an emancipatory education and yet avoid the antidemocratic bias that seems to accompany our thinking of a 'freeing' education? Or, put otherwise: is it possible to think an emancipatory education beyond a problematic of freedom and authority?

It is here that Rancière's writings are most useful. For, as I will try to demonstrate in this chapter, Rancière's writings gradually introduce a shift from the problematic of freedom and authority towards a problematic of equality and inequality. Thus, I will argue that his writings offer a new frame for thinking politically about education. In Chapter 5, we will explore the consequences and the potential of this problematic of equality and inequality for our thinking of education. However, in this chapter we will focus on how this shift develops in Rancière's writings and what this means for the interrelated political questions that preoccupy him most. These questions are: How is it that people become emancipated? How can we think a politics that is radical and yet not authoritarian? And, following from these questions, how can we think about ideology, or 'what people know', without creating and reinforcing the hierarchy between the few who know and the many who are ignorant? In fact, I will try to show that it is in investigating

these questions that Rancière's shift to a problematic of equality and inequality develops, and, in turn, that it is this problematic of equality and inequality that helps him find new ways to address these questions.

It is important to note, however, that Rancière's shift to a problematic of equality and inequality is not complete. It is obvious that 'freedom' and 'authority' remain terms in Rancière's writing; moreover, some of the tensions of the problematic of freedom and authority appear to be extremely important in his conceptualizations of both emancipation and politics. Nevertheless, I would argue that he *translates*—to borrow a favourite verb of Rancière's—the problematic of freedom and authority into a new problematic of equality and inequality.³³⁴ This means that certain tensions of the problematic of freedom and authority remain important for Rancière, but that his shift also opens up a new terrain, which allows different questions to be asked, new problems to be seen, and different evaluations to be made.

We can see evidence of this translation, for example, in Rancière's redefinitions of emancipation. As we have already discussed in Chapter 2, Rancière tries to move away from our Platonic understanding of emancipation and the privileging of the authority of knowledge and the intellectual that it implies. Emancipation is not the liberation that occurs when one gains access to knowledge or truth, but rather the liberation that accompanies a manifestation of equality. It is the activity of expressing equality which produces the experience of freedom. Indeed, according to Rancière, emancipation

³³⁴ For example, "[This article] is guided by the idea that the activity of thinking is primarily an activity of translation, and that anyone is capable of making a translation" from Rancière, "Politics, Identification, Subjectivization", 63.

produces “the pleasure of a new freedom”.³³⁵ However, this pleasurable experience of freedom is the feeling that emancipation feeds off and generates, rather than the act of emancipation itself. The act that is at the heart of emancipation, for Rancière, is a demonstration of equality. As he writes, “emancipation is the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being”³³⁶, it is a “performance of equality”.³³⁷ Thus, freedom remains a part of the experience of emancipation, but Rancière shifts the emphasis from emancipation as an act of liberation to emancipation as an act of equality.

Although we can detect a shift to equality in his definitions of emancipation, it is somewhat disingenuous to rely on the definitions Rancière provides because these definitions are not fixed but contextual. As he stresses, his “‘concepts’ are instable: police and politics, distribution of the sensible, aesthetics, literature, etc. don’t mean the same thing from the beginning of the travel to the end”.³³⁸ For instance, the understanding of emancipation Rancière puts forward in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* through his investigation of Joseph Jacotot is slightly different from the understanding of emancipation that develops in his rethinking of politics.³³⁹ In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* emancipation is presented as the expression of the intellectual equality of individuals, whereas emancipation is later conceived more broadly as the expression of any kind of equality between individuals or social groups.

³³⁵ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 277.

³³⁶ Rancière, “Politics, Identity, and Subjectivization”, 65.

³³⁷ Rancière “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 277.

³³⁸ Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière”, 120.

³³⁹ Rancière, “Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization”, 65.

In all contexts, however, emancipation for Rancière relies on an assumption that the order and organization of our world always contains contingency, arbitrariness, openness or freedom. The existence of this basic ‘freedom’, if one names it this, appears to be a condition for any kind of emancipation. Thus for Rancière freedom is not only a pleasure or passion experienced in emancipation, in a certain sense, it also underlies emancipation itself. One could argue that freedom is involved in emancipation as the simple fact of openness or contingency that makes it possible for people to demonstrate their equality. To illustrate this, we can look more generally at Rancière’s discussions of emancipation. For example, we can point to the importance of this ‘freedom’ in Rancière’s early analyses in *Proletarian Nights*.

In fact, a central theme of this text is that workers exploited the contingency of time in order to create the time for their own emancipation. Rather than following the logic that concluded that workers had no time to think because they had no time for anything other than their manual labour, these workers stole time from their nights in order to “discuss, write compose verses or develop philosophies”.³⁴⁰ As Rancière writes, “These gains in time and freedom were not marginal phenomena or diversions in relation to the construction of the workers’ movement and its great objectives. They were the revolution, both discreet and radical, that made these possible”.³⁴¹ Thus, in a sense, one could argue that it was the freedom these workers’ discovered in the contingency of the idea that days are for working and nights are for sleeping, which allowed them to become emancipated. The workers exploited the gap between the idea of the work day and all the

³⁴⁰ Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, ix.

³⁴¹ Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, ix.

hours in their nights in order to create the time to challenge the assumption that workers had no time to think.

Interestingly, the potentiality of this gap or basic freedom is emphasized in all Rancière's writings. One finds mention of the "gap between names and things" in many of his works.³⁴² In fact, as he suggests in his article "A few remarks on the method of Jacques Rancière", this idea of a gap is explored for its potential in both his writings on politics and aesthetics—as contingency in the former, as indifference in the latter.³⁴³ However, as Rancière also admits, he is certainly not alone in pointing to the gap that exists between our explanations, laws, social organization and the things to which they are supposed to refer.³⁴⁴ Nevertheless he states, "My own intellectual effort has been to think [this] distance [*écart*] [...] differently: that is, neither on the model of a hermeneutics of suspicion nor on a deconstructive model of an interminable digging through the strata of metaphorical meaning".³⁴⁵

As we have described it so far, it would seem that Rancière understands this distance between words and things, or between words and words, as a basic freedom which one can exploit to challenge and overturn existing explanations, laws, social organization, etc. This interpretation is not unfounded, but it keeps our understanding of Rancière's writings squarely within the problematic of freedom and authority. For, according to this interpretation, it is a basic *freedom* that makes emancipation possible. However, what this interpretation ignores is how Rancière interprets this basic freedom

³⁴² Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 94; See also, Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 93; Rancière, *Disagreement*, 82; Rancière, "Dissenting Words", 114; Rancière, "Afterword/The Method of Equality", 278, etc.

³⁴³ Rancière, "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière", 120.

³⁴⁴ Rancière, "Dissenting Words", 114.

³⁴⁵ Rancière, "Dissenting Words", 114-115.

as itself evidence of a basic equality. The ‘fact’ of this basic freedom comes to be seen by Rancière as a ‘fact’ of equality. In what follows, I will argue that this interpretation, or translation, develops in two stages. The first stage develops through Rancière’s engagement with Joseph Jacotot and his rethinking of emancipation, and the second stage through his engagement with the Ancients and his rethinking of politics. It is through these two different interpretive stages that his new understandings of emancipation and politics emerge, and it is through these two different interpretive stages that we see a translation of the problematic of freedom and authority into a problematic of equality and inequality.

Rethinking Emancipation:

As we have previously discussed, Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation was inspired by his archival investigations of nineteenth century workers’ writings. It was this research that formed the basis of his book *Proletarian Nights*, and it was this research which introduced Rancière to the forgotten nineteenth century pedagogue, Joseph Jacotot, whose work is the focus of his famous text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. It is in this latter book that Rancière’s initial shift to equality is most visible. For what Rancière finds explored and articulated in Jacotot’s writings is the equality at the heart of emancipation. In fact, it is through his engagement with Jacotot that Rancière begins to think of the ‘freedom’ of contingency as itself evidence of equality, and it is this interpretation of contingency-as-equality which leads to his greater

emphasis on the practice of equality that makes up emancipation. In order to see this, let us take a closer look at *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* Rancière explores the ideas and the story of the pedagogue Joseph Jacotot. It is important to note that in this exploration Rancière's voice is almost impossible to distinguish from Jacotot's. He does not give a straight and objective account of Jacotot and his practice of teaching. Rather, Rancière's own reflections and preoccupations motivate and organize his exploration of the pedagogue. Thus, as Rancière describes him, Joseph Jacotot is a regular teacher, mostly teaching in Universities, who experiences something in a classroom which transforms his way of thinking about teaching, learning and the intellect. Briefly, his experience is the following: he goes to teach in a university in the Netherlands, and is asked to teach students French. However, his students understand no French whatsoever, and he does not know any Flemish: how is he to explain the intricacies of the French language to them if they will not understand each other? How will he teach? Jacotot decides, given his predicament, to experiment: he gives each student a bilingual copy of the classic *Télémaque* and then leaves them to work their way through it on their own for a term. At the end of the term he asks them to write, in French, a response to the book. To his amazement, the students write very well in French and have insightful things to say about the book.

What is most important, however, is how Jacotot decides to interpret his experience. He decides that the students learning to read and write French on their own was not due to any exceptional circumstances: these students were not exceptionally intelligent, nor was *Télémaque* an exceptionally easy text to learn a language from.

Instead, Jacotot concludes that what his experiences testifies to is that students do not require explanations from their teachers to learn: they can learn on their own. Indeed, he reasons, they can learn on their own without any help from a more educated or intelligent mind because their own intelligence is already equal to their teacher's. In other words, Jacotot decides that his experience testifies to the equality of all intelligences³⁴⁶.

As Rancière recounts it, Jacotot's decision to interpret his experience as evidence of the equality intelligences leads to a revolution in his way of thinking and way of teaching³⁴⁷. First, he explores the possibility of the equality of intelligences. This opinion about intelligences is, of course, at odds with the general assumption that there are people who are smart and people who are stupid. In fact, we tend to think that there are infinite gradations of intelligence.³⁴⁸ According to Jacotot, however, there is no secure evidence one can point to that would tell us once and for all about the capacity of this or that mind:

We can never say: take two equal minds and place them in such and such a condition. We know intelligence by its effects. But we cannot isolate it, measure it.³⁴⁹

Indeed, it is only possible to measure *manifestations* of intelligence.³⁵⁰ What we normally do is explain different manifestations of intelligence—Sally performed better on a math test than Max—by claiming that they are evidence of different levels of intelligence.³⁵¹ However, we cannot know this to be the true cause of the difference in manifestations of intelligence. Different performances on the test are just as likely to be caused by Max's obsession with his dog, his crush on Sally, his frustration with the teacher, his failure to

³⁴⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 2-4.

³⁴⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 4.

³⁴⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 46.

³⁴⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 46.

³⁵⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 49.

³⁵¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 49.

do any homework, his itchy foot, etc. And because we cannot compare Sally and Max's intelligences directly, it is impossible to offer an absolutely secure explanation as to why the manifestations of their intelligences are different.

This means, therefore, that it is also possible to offer a different explanation for their performances,

I will not say that [Max] has done less well because he is less intelligent. I will say that he has perhaps produced poorer work because he has worked more poorly, that he has not seen well because he hasn't looked well. I will say that he has brought less attention to his work.³⁵²

This explanation can also not be proven with any certainty; however, it is possible to hold the opinion that what explains different manifestations of intelligence is not unequal capacity but unequal attention. Intelligences are equal, but we direct more or less attention to different tasks. Moreover, there are also many examples and situations, like the one Jacotot himself experienced, which seem to demonstrate that intelligences are equal. As Jacotot highlights, one such example is the fact that almost every child in their first few years learns to speak their mother tongue with great competence, without any formal instruction or guidance. Thus it seems reasonable to hold the opinion that all intelligences are equal. Given this, Jacotot concludes, why not operate on the *assumption* that all intelligences are equal and see what can come of it?³⁵³

Second, based on this assumption of the equality of intelligences Jacotot develops a systematic critique of what he calls the "Explicative Order"³⁵⁴. For part of what interests Jacotot is how, if intelligences are equal, people have come to believe with such certainty in a hierarchy of intelligences? One answer he gives is that there is a

³⁵² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 50.

³⁵³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 45.

³⁵⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 6.

pedagogical logic perpetuated in schools and society at large that assumes not only a hierarchy of intelligence but also that those of lesser intelligence require progressively more sophisticated explanations from those with more intelligence in order to learn.³⁵⁵ This basic practice of teaching—progressive explanation—sets up a hierarchical relation between the teacher who knows everything and the student who knows nothing. The teacher teaches by explaining material to the student with the assumption that the student could not possibly learn the material on her own. The student may learn the material, but the student will also learn that no matter how hard she works the teacher will always be more intelligent and that she will not be able to catch up. The division between the knowing teacher and ignorant student is maintained until perhaps the student herself becomes a teacher. Thus, what is created and then reinforced in this explicative order is a hierarchy of intelligence. The basic teaching relationship not only establishes a distinction between those who know and those who don't, but also creates a spectrum of intelligence from those at the beginning of their development to those nearing the end. For all those who are in the position of 'student', however, what is learned in this explicative order is their own incapacity; as Rancière writes, "one intelligence is subordinated to the other".³⁵⁶ According to Rancière Jacotot names this process of intellectual subordination "stultification", or in French, "abrutissement"—to render stupid like a brute.³⁵⁷

Lastly, to counter this explicative order, Jacotot develops a new method of teaching that follows from the founding assumption that all intelligences are equal.

³⁵⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 3.

³⁵⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 13.

³⁵⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 7.

Jacotot reasons that a teaching practice that bases itself on the assumption of the equality of intelligences must mimic the ‘natural’ process of learning as much as possible. He describes this natural process as moving along “blindly” by “observing and retaining, repeating and verifying, by relating what [one is] trying to know to what [one] knew already, by doing and reflecting about what [one] had done”³⁵⁸. Universal teaching³⁵⁹, as he names his new teaching practice, must make use of these ‘natural’ strategies that a student is already always familiar with insofar as they have learned to speak and function in the world. However, universal teaching still requires an authoritative relation between teacher and student. A student won’t learn on their own unless someone else makes them, because of the common human vice of laziness that develops with age and comfort³⁶⁰. Or, as Rancière puts it more poetically, “where need ceases, intelligence slumbers, unless some stronger will makes itself understood and says: continue”³⁶¹. Thus, teaching is still required, but the teacher’s role is not to be an explicator of material but a master, a more powerful will. The teacher must create a situation of need that “obliges [the student] to realize his capacity”³⁶². In other words, the teacher’s presence and his commands to the student will mimic the ‘necessity of nature’ and force the student to use her own wits to figure out or to learn whatever is being demanded.

However, in order that the teacher’s own intelligence does not infiltrate this authoritative relation between teacher and student, and thereby introduce stultification, Jacotot insists that the teacher must be ignorant, hence the title ‘Ignorant

³⁵⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 10.

³⁵⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 18.

³⁶⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 51.

³⁶¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 51.

³⁶² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 15.

Schoolmaster³⁶³. The teacher practicing universal teaching must not be knowledgeable about the subject that the student wants to learn: if the student must learn French, the teacher should not know any French; if the student wants to learn the violin, the teacher must not know how to play the violin; and if the teacher cannot read, the teacher must also be illiterate. Instead of the teacher's role being to explain his own understanding of a book to the student, the teacher's role is to demand that the student read the book and give her own explanation. To ensure that the student has not shirked her task, the teacher will ask the student to verify her own explanation against the book: where does the book say that? Why did you interpret this passage this way and not another? As Rancière explains, the teacher “will not verify what the student has found; he will verify that the student has searched”³⁶⁴. The book—or the painting, or the piece of music, or the experiment, or the mathematical proof—becomes a common object between the teacher and the student, which allows the teacher to verify that the student is learning, without himself having to know a subject in advance.

Thus, the teacher's role is two-fold in Jacotot's method of universal teaching: first, to be an “intractable master” who forces a student to learn for herself using the ‘natural’ methods at her disposal³⁶⁵; and second, to *verify* that the student has learnt by asking her to return again and again to the common object between them. What is clear, then, is that the student's learning is not formed or dictated in advance by the teacher's superior understanding or knowledge about the world. The student is quite literally ‘free’ to learn as she chooses. As Jacotot admits, this method of teaching no doubt often takes a

³⁶³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 14.

³⁶⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 31.

³⁶⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 38.

long time, and it is certainly not the most efficient; moreover, the teacher and the student will never know whether the student has ‘got it right’. As Rancière explains, “It is a matter of daring to be adventurous, and not whether one learns more or less well or more or less quickly”³⁶⁶. However, for Jacotot, this ‘getting it right’ is impossible anyway; for, he argues that all language, all human communication and artifice, always falls short of the truth which he argues exists independently of us.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, a person who continually seeks to learn, continually searches, continually returns to the book or problem she is trying to understand, will circle closer and closer to the truth she is aiming for. Therefore, it is of no great concern if on a student’s first attempt to solve a mathematical equation, her answer does not seem to follow in a logical manner. She will be asked why she gave this answer and not another? How did she come to this answer? Can her steps be repeated? And, in so doing, she may eventually come to an answer that follows more easily or is less convoluted than her first one.

What this more open ended practice of learning signals, is that the aim of Jacotot’s universal teaching is not to ensure that students learn this or that particular bit of knowledge, but that they learn to think by themselves. In fact, this is what Jacotot calls “emancipation”: “the act of an intelligence obeying only itself, even while the will obeys another will”³⁶⁸. Intellectual emancipation is learning that one can learn, that one can think independently. Thus, for Jacotot, intellectual emancipation is a particular way of imagining the experience of what we have been calling ‘free thinking’. Interestingly, for Jacotot having this ability to think freely, to be intellectually emancipated, is also the only

³⁶⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 28.

³⁶⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 58.

³⁶⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 13.

prerequisite for becoming a ‘master’ of universal teaching: “to emancipate someone else, one must be emancipated oneself. One must know oneself to be a voyager of the mind, similar to all other voyagers: an intellectual subject participating in the power common to intellectual beings”.³⁶⁹ As this passage emphasizes, however, emancipation for Jacotot means not only discovering the individual ability to think freely but also discovering the capacity of others to do likewise. For he argues that if a student comes to believe she is the only one capable of such emancipation, her own pride in her ability will get in the way of her pursuit of the truth: she will be ashamed of failure, be too cautious around other minds, etc. Thus, the task of the teacher is not only to convince the student that she is of equal intelligence to the teacher and capable of learning on her own, but that her younger brother and the poor man in the street are also of equal intelligence. Indeed, when the teacher asks the student to *verify* her learning, he is not only asking her to compare her thoughts with those in a book, but asking her to witness a proof of the equality of intelligences. In so doing, he hopes she too will see that it is possible that all intelligences are equal. Indeed, it is the practice of universal teaching itself which provides its own evidence for why anyone should believe in its founding assumption: the equality of intelligences.

We can already see, then, how Jacotot’s thought and practice of universal teaching follows from his initial decision that it is reasonable to believe that all intelligences are equal. It is also clear that this move puts ‘equality’ at the front and centre of his thinking about education. However, it is still unclear how exactly this involves a translation of concerns with freedom into concerns with equality. To see this,

³⁶⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 33.

we must turn to Rancière exploration of Jacotot’s understanding of language. It is here that Rancière seems to discover the link between contingency and equality, or more precisely, how the contingency of language can be interpreted as evidence of the equal intellectual capacity of human beings.

As we have already seen, once Jacotot assumed the equality of intelligences, he began to reason his way through many related problems. One of these was the problem of language. Rancière recounts that many in Jacotot’s day held dear “the analogy between the laws of language, the laws of society, and the laws of thought and their unity, in principle, in divine law”.³⁷⁰ Despite this, however, Jacotot decides that “languages are arbitrary” and that there is “no language of intelligence, no language more universal than others”.³⁷¹ Neither reason, nor truth are guaranteed by “language’s laws”.³⁷² Rancière notes, “It was this thesis on the arbitrariness of languages—even more than the proclamation of universal teaching—that made Jacotot’s teaching scandalous”.³⁷³ What is important about this thesis for us is that it underscores the ‘basic freedom’ that exists for Jacotot within our relationship to language. He insists, for example, that there is a “gap between feeling and expression”.³⁷⁴

However, why this gap, arbitrariness or freedom is important for Jacotot is because it follows from, and helps to explain, the equality of intelligences: “It is because there is no code given by divinity, no language of languages, that human intelligence employs all its art to making itself understood and to understanding what the neighboring

³⁷⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 61.

³⁷¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 60.

³⁷² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 62.

³⁷³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 60.

³⁷⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 68.

intelligence is signifying”.³⁷⁵ The thesis of the arbitrariness of languages is emphasized by Jacotot, therefore, because he sees it as further evidence of the equality of intelligences. For Jacotot argues, if languages are arbitrary this means that all communication relies on the equal power of people to translate their feelings into words so that others may understand them, and counter-translate the words of others so that they understand others. Jacotot speaks of it as a “flux and reflux, a kind of perpetual improvisation”.³⁷⁶ As Rancière elaborates, “The impossibility of *saying* the truth, even if we *feel* it, makes us speak as poets, makes us tell the story of our minds’ adventures and verify that they are understood by other adventurers, makes us communicate our feelings and see them shared by other feeling beings”.³⁷⁷ What the arbitrariness of languages means for Jacotot, then, is that all people must share this “poetic virtue”—this capacity for translation and improvisation—and that all successful communication is testament to this equal capacity.³⁷⁸ Thus, the basic freedom that the thesis of the arbitrariness of languages implies is interpreted as evidence of the equality intelligences. To traverse the gap between feelings and words in order to communicate with others we must first gamble on “the bet of the similarity of minds”.³⁷⁹

It is likely that Rancière is not completely convinced by Jacotot’s understanding of language, nor by his understanding of the mind, will, reason, truth, etc. However, this does not matter much, for, as Rancière stresses, Jacotot never claimed that he possessed the truth of these matters, merely reasonable deductions based on available facts. What Rancière decides to hold onto from Jacotot’s analysis, therefore, is the possibility of

³⁷⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 62.

³⁷⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 64.

³⁷⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 64.

³⁷⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 64.

³⁷⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 68.

interpreting the arbitrariness of language as evidence of equality. In fact, it is an interpretation that he himself repeats and extends beyond the text of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. For example, in *On the Shores of Politics* Rancière claims that “democratic man” is “a being capable of embracing a distance between words and things which is not deception, not trickery, but humanity [...] This means starting from the point of view of equality, asserting equality, assuming equality as a given, working out from equality, trying to see how productive it can be”.³⁸⁰ Or as he argues in his interview “Dissenting Words”,

literarity refers at once to the excess of words available in relation to the thing named; to that excess relating to the requirements for the production of life; and finally, to an excess of words vis-à-vis the modes of communication that function to legitimate “the proper” itself. We can conclude, then, that humans are political animals because they are literary animals: not only in the Aristotelian sense of using language in order to discuss questions of justice, but also because we are confounded by the excess of words in relation to things. Humans are political animals, then, for two reasons: first, because we have the power to put into circulation more words, “useless” and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation; secondly, because this fundamental ability to proliferate words is unceasingly contested by those who claim to “speak correctly”—that is, by the masters of designation and classification who, by virtue of wanting to retain their status and power, flat-out deny this capacity to speak.³⁸¹

Indeed, even if Rancière later refers to the ‘gap’ as a gap between words and things or a gap between words and words, the central claim remains the same: it is possible to argue that the basic freedom within our relationship to language is evidence of the equality of intelligences. This basic ‘fact’ of freedom can be seen as a basic ‘fact’ of equality.

Rancière follows Jacotot closely on at least two other points, which stem from this interpretation. First, as we shall take up in more detail later, like Jacotot he continues to insist that the equality that is testified to by the arbitrariness of languages is the *equality of intelligences*. This is important given that it is what makes both Jacotot and Rancière’s

³⁸⁰ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 51.

³⁸¹ Rancière, “Dissenting Words”, 115.

thought most original and radical. As Rancière claims, “The equality of intelligences remains the most untimely of thoughts it is possible to nourish about the social order”.³⁸² There are, of course, many thinkers who have argued, before and after Jacotot, that humans share equal capacities of the mind. These mental capacities are what distinguish humans from animals and, for some, they are what justify the need for some basic equality in the social order. However, no one ever claims that humans are of equal intelligence. We may be equal in so far as we all have some basic capacity to be reasonable or to speak, but it is simply *obvious* to most people that humans vary greatly in their ability to reason, think or speak. This leads them to assume that our intellectual powers are vastly unequal. In contrast, Jacotot maintains that the arbitrariness of languages means that our equality is manifested in each and every successful communication. The equality of our intellectual powers is demonstrated in each act of speech and each act of listening, even if some people are more articulate than others: “no one is born with more intelligence than his neighbor, [...] the superiority that someone might manifest is only the fruit of as tenacious an application to working with words as another might show to working with tools; [...] the inferiority of someone else is the consequence of circumstances that didn’t compel him to seek harder”.³⁸³ The equality of intelligences is not a basic capacity for intelligence, but an actively used, common power demonstrated in every communication between individuals. It is this more radical claim of equality that Rancière takes from Jacotot and continually returns to in his other writings.

³⁸² Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, xii.

³⁸³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 71.

Second, following from this, Rancière highlights and reformulates Jacotot's deduction that if the arbitrariness of languages is testament to the equality of intelligences, this means that this equality actually sustains the inequality of the social order. According to Jacotot, the inequality of the social order does not stem from any necessity, but simply our "primitive passion" of contempt and our "laziness in the face of the infinite task equality demands".³⁸⁴ As he notes, "It is easier to *compare* one self, to establish social exchange as that swapmeet of glory and contempt where each person receives a superiority in exchange for the inferiority he confesses to".³⁸⁵ It is because individuals can be possessed by this "passion" of inequality, that the social order does not reflect the equality of intelligences. It is individuals' irrationality which produces the inequality present in all societies. Indeed, the social order is "an activity of the perverted will, possessed by inequality's passion. In *linking* one person or group to another by *comparison*, individuals continually reproduce this irrationality, this stultification that institutions codify and explicators solidify in their brains".³⁸⁶ What is clear, then, is that for Jacotot it is individuals who create the inequality of the social world. This inequality is the work of equal intelligences possessed by irrational passions: the "will no longer attempts to figure out and to be figured out. It makes its goal the other's silence, the absence of reply, the plummeting of minds into the material aggregation of consent".³⁸⁷

Moreover, not only must intelligences do the work of stratification, comparison and domination, but they also must do the work of consent and obedience. Here again we see evidence of the equality of intelligences. According to Jacotot, the continued

³⁸⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 80.

³⁸⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 80.

³⁸⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 82.

³⁸⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 82.

subjugation of the inferior by the superior can only be explained by the equality of intelligences—how else would you explain the servant continuing to carry out the orders from his master, the woman from her husband? The servant and the woman must not only be able to understand their masters’ orders in order to carry them out, they must also be able to understand their inferiority, their place. Their masters must “neither [be] superior nor inferior to them in intelligence”, since the relationship of inequality requires both parties to participate.³⁸⁸ Continued and proper obedience requires that the servant and the woman understand, affirm and perform the hierarchies, the laws and the norms of the social order. Thus, the inequality of the social order requires the equality of intelligences to keep it working on two fronts—the creation of superiority and the creation of inferiority.

Rancière expands on Jacotot’s analysis of the relationship between equality and inequality in the social order in his other writings. For example, in his elaboration of his concept of politics in *Disagreement*, he argues:

At the heart of all arguing and all litigious argument of a political nature lies a basic quarrel as to what understanding language implies. Clearly, all interlocution supposes comprehension of some kind of content of the illocution. The contentious issue is whether this understanding presupposes a telos of mutual understanding.³⁸⁹

In other words, the contentious issue in politics is whether the understanding that is necessary in all communication presupposes the equality of intelligences. Politics springs from this “quarrel” over what understanding means. He continues:

We can deduce either something or nothing from such an understanding. From the fact that a command is understood by an inferior we can simply deduce that such a command was indeed given, that the person giving orders has succeeded in their work, and that as a result the person receiving the order will indeed carry out their own work [...] Another, completely contrary,

³⁸⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 88.

³⁸⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 48.

deduction can also be made: the inferior has understood the superior's order because the inferior takes part in the same community of speaking beings and so is, in this sense, their equal. In short, we can deduce that the inequality of social ranks works only because of the very equality of speaking beings.³⁹⁰

We can see quite clearly in this passage, Rancière's appropriation of Jacotot's argument. He presents Jacotot's account as an equally possible interpretation of the 'facts': it is possible to explain the 'fact' of mutual understanding as evidence of equality, which in turn means that the inequality of the social order is sustained by "the equality of speaking beings". As Rancière repeats and elaborates again in *Hatred of Democracy*,

Equality is not a fiction. All superiors experience this as the most commonplace of realities. There is no master who does not sit back and risk letting his slave run away, no man who is not capable of killing another, no force that is imposed without having to justify itself, and hence without having to recognize the irreducibility of equality needed for inequality to function. From the moment obedience has to refer to a principle of legitimacy, from the moment it is necessary for there to be laws that are enforced qua laws and institutions embodying the common of the community, commanding must presuppose the equality of the one who commands and the one who is commanded. Those who think they are clever and realist can always say that equality is only the fanciful dream of fools and tender souls. But unfortunately for them it is a reality that is constantly and everywhere attested to. There is no service that is carried out, no knowledge that is imparted, no authority that is established without the master having, however little, to speak 'equal to equal' with the one he commands or instructs. Inegalitarian society can only function thanks to a multitude of egalitarian relations.³⁹¹

Thus, Rancière clearly holds unto Jacotot's line of reasoning: if language is arbitrary and yet humans seem to understand each other, this can be interpreted as testament to the equality of intelligences, which means, in turn, that the unequal relationships that exist in our social order are maintained by relationships of equality. In other words, social inequality is maintained by an equal capacity to speak and understand. As Rancière summarizes: "In the final analysis, inequality is only possible through equality".³⁹²

It is clear, therefore, that Rancière discovers in Jacotot a way to interpret 'the gap' or the basic freedom within language as evidence of equality. Moreover, the line of

³⁹⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 49.

³⁹¹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 48.

³⁹² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

reasoning that follows from this interpretation offers up the politically charged possibilities of the equality of intelligences and relations of equality that ground the inequality of the social order, which Rancière clearly finds attractive. We can also see, even in this brief account, that in borrowing and extending the connection Jacotot makes between the arbitrariness of languages and the equality of intelligences that a problematic of equality and inequality begins to take shape in Rancière's writings. If the basic freedom or openness of language is interpreted as evidence of a basic equality, then our focus shifts to this fact of equality: Where can we see evidence of this equality? How is it manifested? How can it be made visible? How can it have more of an effect? In fact, what this indicates, again, is the importance of where one begins: not only is it important to begin with equality rather than inequality, but it is important that Rancière begins with equality rather than freedom. For example: if the arbitrariness of languages were instead interpreted as testament to the ultimate freedom of individuals, it is likely that experiencing and expressing this freedom would become the aim of thought and action. In contrast, by insisting on the explanation of the equality of intelligences, our attention is directed towards investigating and testing this equality. Freedom becomes a pleasure, an experience that can accompany equality, rather than the central focus and ultimate goal. Thus, as Rancière notes, at one level it all turns on which "interpretation of the void" one insists upon.³⁹³

However, although a problematic of equality and inequality clearly emerges in Rancière's writing through his engagement with Jacotot, this problematic is still mapped too exactly, as it were, onto the problematic of freedom and authority. More precisely,

³⁹³ Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics", Thesis 5.

equality is associated too closely with the freedom of individuals, which, in turn is juxtaposed to the inequality and oppressive authority of the social order. Indeed, according to Jacotot, the equality of intelligences can only be expressed and verified between individuals. This is because intelligence belongs to an individual, not to a group, not to an institution, not to a law, not to any social form;³⁹⁴ and, because an intelligence can only be verified in communication with another intelligence. Therefore, the manifestation of equality, or more precisely *emancipation*, can only occur between individuals: “there is not equality except between men”.³⁹⁵ Or again, “There cannot be a class of the emancipated, an assembly or a society of the emancipated”.³⁹⁶ In fact, for Jacotot there is an unbridgeable gulf between the equality that can express itself between individuals and the laws, categories, and institutions of the social order. According to Jacotot, the social order is inevitably “the land of inequality”³⁹⁷. This is because the social order is arbitrary—an order of conventions, which will inevitably reflect the “primitive passion” of inequality.³⁹⁸ The only thing society can offer is “the superiority of order over disorder”.³⁹⁹ Moreover, Jacotot insists that we must realize our inability to change the social order, or, more precisely, our inability to emancipate society.⁴⁰⁰

Therefore, even though Jacotot claims that the inequality of society can only be explained by the equality of intelligences, he nevertheless maintains that this equality can never be manifested in society’s laws and institutions. We can see, then, that despite introducing a new focus on equality, Jacotot retains a familiar dichotomy between the

³⁹⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 77.

³⁹⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 90.

³⁹⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 98.

³⁹⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 90.

³⁹⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 80.

³⁹⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 91.

⁴⁰⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 89.

freedom and equality that it is possible to experience as an individual and the oppressive, hierarchical authority of society. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, as well as in other political writings like *On the Shores of Politics*, Rancière seems ambivalent, yet accepting of Jacotot's account. On the one hand, he clearly thinks Jacotot's suspicion of those who wanted to institutionalize equality in social forms was not only right, but prescient: "Jacotot was the only *egalitarian* to perceive the representation and institutionalization of progress as a renouncing of the moral and intellectual adventure of equality, public instruction as the griefwork of emancipation".⁴⁰¹ Jacotot provides Rancière with a powerful critique of not only the "Men of Progress" of Jacotot's day,⁴⁰² but also of the radical utopian projects that follow shortly thereafter, as well as the dreams of contemporary republicans seeking to 're-establish' equality in France.⁴⁰³ Jacotot recognized, according to Rancière, the impossibility of founding a society of equals.⁴⁰⁴

On the other hand, as long as Rancière follows Jacotot he must accept that there can be no politics, no hope for transforming society.⁴⁰⁵ As he writes, in *Disagreement*, according to Jacotot politics "cannot be anything other than policing, that is, the denial of equality".⁴⁰⁶ To elaborate: if emancipation can only be individual, then this means equality cannot be expressed within any social form. There can be no institutionalization of equality, however limited or brief. Even if one accepts that society will always be unequal, the impossibility of any expression of equality within society is deeply

⁴⁰¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 134.

⁴⁰² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 109.

⁴⁰³ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 80.

⁴⁰⁴ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 81.

⁴⁰⁵ Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization", 64.

⁴⁰⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35.

pessimistic. To be fair, for Jacotot society can be improved the more individuals there are that are emancipated. Indeed, Rancière insists rather lamely near the end of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* that “a society, a people, a state will always be irrational. But one can multiply within these bodies the number of people who, as individuals, will make use of reason, and who, as citizens, will know how to seek the art of raving as reasonably as possible”.⁴⁰⁷ Despite whatever attractions there may be to the proliferation of individual emancipation, if one hopes for any kind of social change this is clearly an unsatisfying conclusion. Freedom and equality are positioned so absolutely in opposition to society that it becomes impossible to think and act politically.

In his later writings on politics, as I will argue shortly, Rancière finds a way to push past this stark opposition, and in so doing he displaces the problematic of equality and inequality a little further from its mapping onto the problematic of freedom and authority. What is interesting to note, however, is that in relation to education the problematic of equality and inequality that Rancière elaborates alongside Jacotot *does* break from the problematic of freedom and authority. In fact, within his reflections on education Jacotot does not maintain the stark dichotomy that he does politically, and the practice of “universal teaching” that he outlines ignores the tensions between freedom and authority that so often preoccupy political thinkers of education. For example, one might expect given Jacotot’s insistence that emancipation can only occur between individuals, that he would have an individualistic understanding of emancipation. However, this is clearly not the case: although it is possible for an individual to “self-emancipate”, one individual can also emancipate another. At the most basic level, even if

⁴⁰⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 98.

emancipation is carried out alone, it requires a relationship between self and other. This is because emancipation is defined as a performance and verification of equality, and equality cannot be performed or verified unless there are at least two. An individual may verify their equality with the absent author of a book, but an individual may also verify their equality with their father, their friend, their sister or their teacher. Given equality is at the heart of emancipation for Jacotot, he cannot hold a purely individualistic understanding of emancipation as freedom from the authority of others.

However, Jacotot's practice of universal teaching displaces the conventional problematic of freedom and authority even further. For, not only does the verification of equality require two, but it often requires the *authority* of an other. This is because, according to Jacotot, we get lazy and distracted as we grow older:

We know why young children direct so similar an intelligence to exploring their world and learning their language. Instinct and need drive them equally. They all have just about the same needs to satisfy, and they all want equally to enter human society enjoying all the advantages and rights of speaking beings. And for this intelligence must not come to a standstill.

'The child is surrounded by objects that speak to him, all at once, in different languages; he must study them separately and together; they have no relationship and often contradict each other. He can make nothing of all the idioms in which nature speaks to him—through his eyes, his touch, through all his senses—simultaneously. He must repeat often to remember so many absolutely arbitrary signs... What great attention is necessary for all that!'

This giant step taken, the need becomes less imperious, the attention less constant and the child gets used to learning through the eyes of others.[...] There where need ceases, intelligence slumbers, unless some stronger will makes itself understood and says: continue; look at what you are doing and what you *can* do if you apply the same intelligence you have already made use of, by bringing to each thing the same attention, by not letting yourself stray from your path.⁴⁰⁸

However, not only our are circumstances less compelling as we grow older, but we become convinced by the explanations of the social order: there are superior minds and there are inferior minds, there is a clear distinction between 'science' and 'ignorance',

⁴⁰⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 51.

careful and progressive explanations are needed in order to learn, etc.⁴⁰⁹ We take our place in the “circle of powerlessness”.⁴¹⁰ This is why Jacotot names the practice of equality *emancipation*: for this practice of equality to begin, we must first be liberated from our passion for inequality and the social order’s solidification of this passion. The “circle of emancipation must be *begun*”.⁴¹¹

However, as he admits, “this is the most difficult leap”.⁴¹² To free ourselves from the circle of powerlessness we most likely need the help of an Other. Perhaps we simply need to be told “all intelligences are equal”. But more likely what the teacher can do for her student, the father for his son, the sister for her brother, the neighbor for his friend is imitate the constraints of nature and compel a person to use their own intelligence to learn. “A person—and a child in particular—may need a master when his own will is not strong enough to set him on track and keep him there”.⁴¹³ Emancipation often requires an Other, then, not only to participate in the verification of the equality of intelligences, but to free the student from the circle of powerlessness with the use of his or her authority, to use his or her authority to show a student the power of his or her own intelligence. This is the role that the teacher must play, and this is why it is best if the teacher is ignorant.⁴¹⁴ For, if the teacher’s authority is also drawn from his or her superior knowledge and intelligence, then again we are returned to a situation of stultification.⁴¹⁵ What emancipation requires is the “pure” domination of one will over another, an authority

⁴⁰⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 13 and 6.

⁴¹⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 15.

⁴¹¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.

⁴¹² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.

⁴¹³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 13.

⁴¹⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 30.

⁴¹⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.

drawn solely from the role of ‘master’.⁴¹⁶ This takes the form of two basic tasks: “[The teacher] *interrogates*, he demands speech, that is to say, the manifestation of an intelligence that wasn’t aware of itself or that had given up. And he *verifies* that the work of the intelligence is done with attention, that the words don’t say just anything in order to escape from the constraint”.⁴¹⁷ Thus, the teacher must make use of his or her authority as an ignorant *master* in order to emancipate a student, in order to “reveal an intelligence to itself”.⁴¹⁸

Within this practice of universal teaching, or teaching-towards-emancipation, it is clear that the problematic of equality and inequality does not line up neatly with any conventional understanding of the problematic of freedom and authority. In fact, as Rancière notes, it instigates a “rupture with the logic of all pedagogies”.⁴¹⁹ What Rancière has in mind here is its break from the logic that understands the role of teaching to be the transmission of knowledge, the carefully guided journey from ignorance to knowledge.⁴²⁰ However, we can also see that it breaks from the standard political framings of the problematic of freedom and authority within education. More specifically, emancipation—the practice and demonstration of the equality of intelligences—has a complicated relationship with freedom and authority. On the one hand, emancipation requires being freed and freeing oneself from the oppressions of the passion of inequality. On the other, emancipation requires the authority—the domination and the mastery—of an Other. Equality, in this context, is not clearly on the side of either freedom or authority.

⁴¹⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.

⁴¹⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 29.

⁴¹⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 28.

⁴¹⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 13.

⁴²⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 14.

Indeed, Jacotot's understanding of emancipation turns conventional mappings of freedom and authority within education on their head. As we have already suggested, Jacotot gives us a way to imagine the 'free thinking' of education as a practice of equality, and in so doing he allows us to consider this practice in ways that do not fall neatly into the common parameters of the problematic of freedom and authority. Precisely because of this, Jacotot's understanding of emancipation and the practice of universal teaching he elaborates seem to offer up more interesting possibilities for thinking through equality than does his 'political' analysis. In fact, his discussions of universal teaching may provide interesting ways to think a politics of equality, even though his own thought dismisses the possibility of such a politics.

Rethinking of Politics:

Rancière, however, finds more inspiration for thinking a politics of equality in his re-readings of the Ancients. It is with these re-readings that he finds a way to move past the choice presented by Jacotot: either the proliferation of individual emancipation without the hope of any social change, or doomed attempts at social change which, in the end, only solidify a new form of inequality. What Rancière finds in the Ancients is a way to think how freedom can be interpreted as evidence of equality within a social context. Thus, he discovers a way to imagine how his new understanding of emancipation can actually have a political form. Although questions of education recede from the frame in this particular engagement with the Ancients, as we shall take up in Chapter 5, this engagement has important consequences for our thinking about education. How Rancière

comes to understand politics, and how this understanding further entrenches a problematic of equality and inequality, points to ways to expand on his analysis of education alongside Jacotot. Before we explore these consequences, however, let us turn to Rancière's rethinking of politics.

Rancière develops his rethinking of politics in most detail in his books *Disagreement: politics and philosophy* and *Hatred of Democracy*. In *Disagreement*, his analysis draws from Aristotle's discussion of how the best form of government would be a carefully balanced mix of the values of the different parties of society—"the wealth of the smallest number (*olgoi*), the virtue or excellence (*aretê*) from which the best (*aristoi*) derive their name, and the freedom (*eleutheria*) that belongs to the people (*demos*)."⁴²¹ It is this equation of the *demos* with freedom that Rancière finds intriguing. He asks: "what does the freedom of the people bring to the community? And in what way is it peculiar to them?"⁴²² For, as he points out, freedom would not seem to belong exclusively to the *demos*, but rather to all citizens.⁴²³ So why the link between freedom and the *demos*?

This question leads us to the heart of the matter for Rancière, or rather to the scandal that is at the heart of democracy. Rancière notes that this freedom that is linked to the *demos* is really an "empty property"; it simply designates the people who "are nothing more than the undifferentiated mass of those who have no positive qualification—no wealth, no virtue—but who are nonetheless acknowledged to enjoy the same freedom as those who do".⁴²⁴ "Freedom" becomes the name for the 'quality' of

⁴²¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 6.

⁴²² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 7.

⁴²³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 8.

⁴²⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 8.

those who really have no qualification but are included anyway. This qualification-that-is-not-one recalls “the brute fact” that those without qualification came to be counted within the Athenian community: “The simple impossibility of the *olgoi*’s reducing their debtors to slavery was transformed into the appearance of a freedom that was to be the positive property of the people as a part of the community”.⁴²⁵ The freedom that belongs to the demos is a reminder, therefore, of the scandal that the demos belong to the Athenian community at all.

Moreover, the demos’ link with freedom amplifies this scandal. First, the freedom claimed by the demos manifests the equality of those who have no qualifications with those who do have qualifications. The demos is part of the community, just like the wealthy and the nobles. Indeed, the freedom that belongs to the demos is actually the freedom that belongs to everyone: the demos are “in fact simply free *like* the rest”.⁴²⁶ This identification of the inferiors with the superiors highlights an equality that exists between everyone who belongs to the community. The demos shares in the freedom that belongs to all Athenian citizens. Their freedom demonstrates their equality.

However, this equality is “contentious”.⁴²⁷ It is contentious for the simple reason that superiors are always reluctant to recognize their equality with their inferiors. But it is also contentious because the demos appropriate the “common virtue” of freedom as their own positive qualification and thereby identify themselves with the community as a whole.⁴²⁸ In other words, in an outrageous move, their claim to a shared equality in

⁴²⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 7.

⁴²⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 8.

⁴²⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

⁴²⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

freedom is extended into a claim *over* freedom. This claim over freedom is then extended into a claim over the community as a whole. The demos' claim to freedom becomes a claim to speak for, and be, *the people*. According to this logic, if the demos belong to the community because they share in the freedom of Athenian citizens, then 'freedom' is the 'qualification' of the demos, which, in turn, suggests that if all citizens share in this 'qualification' of freedom, then the demos really *is* the people. In this way the demos' equality with their superiors is extended beyond itself and causes tension and dispute within the community.

As if this were not inflammatory enough, the equality that is manifested by the demos' shared freedom with their superiors "gnaws away" at the hierarchies and legitimizations of the community.⁴²⁹ This is because it is "in the name of the wrong done them by other parties that the people identify with whole of the community".⁴³⁰ As was already noted, although the demos turn 'freedom' into a positive qualification that belongs to them, the 'freedom' which they share with their superiors denotes their lack of any positive qualification for belonging to the community. This identification of the demos with their superiors through their absence of qualification undermines the surety of all the social distinctions which their superiors' claim. As Rancière writes, "what the empty freedom of the Athenians presents [...] is simply the equality of anyone at all with anyone else: in other words, in the final analysis, the absence of *arkhê*, the sheer contingency of the social order".⁴³¹ It raises the question: if those with no qualification are fit to govern and equal to those with qualification, in what way is possessing the

⁴²⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

⁴³⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

⁴³¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 15.

qualifications of wealth or expertise superior? Indeed, the equality evidenced between the demos and their superiors challenges all the distinctions made between them. It challenges all claims of ‘natural’ superiority or authority. It challenges the idea that certain qualifications are needed to speak, think, and govern. In this sense, it highlights the “ultimate anarchy” or “lack of foundation” upon which a social order rests.⁴³² The equality of the demos with their superiors threatens the naturalized hierarchies and the authoritative legitimizations of the social order.

We can see, then, that the equality that the demos manifests through their “freedom” is neither straightforward nor complete. Rather, it institutes a social expression of equality that is rife with dispute. Paradoxically, however, it is because the equality of the demos is upsetting that it is politically effective. The different conflicts that are begun by the demos’ link with freedom, each open up space for further discussions and demonstrations of equality. Therefore, there is a real dynamism to the contentiousness of the equality of the demos. Most importantly, however this contentiousness seems to offer Rancière a way to imagine a social expression of equality that is suspended, as it were, between the poles of a common equality institutionalized within a community and an anarchic equality. On the one hand, the equality that the demos demonstrates creates a common bond between the demos and their superiors, and even a common bond between the community as a whole. In this way, the demos institutes a form of universal equality. On the other hand, this same equality is profoundly anarchic. It poses a challenge to all distinctions and divisions of the community; it dissolves all standards; it undermines all tradition. Therefore, one could argue that the equality of the demos amplifies a ‘scandal’

⁴³² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

in two directions, which, in turn, is also productive: first, it institutes a common equality between the demos and their superiors that instigates disputes over entitlements and rights within the community, which then encourages further demonstrations of equality; and, second, the common equality it reveals dissolves all the markers of the community and this threatens the very understanding the community has of itself, which then can be mobilized by the demos to argue for more egalitarian relations. The equality of the demos is, thus, doubly upsetting and doubly productive. This is why Rancière describes this process as working from both “the presupposition of the equality of anyone and everyone, [and/] or the paradoxical effectiveness of the sheer contingency of any order”.⁴³³

Rancière develops a parallel analysis in *Hatred of Democracy*, but this time beginning with Plato’s list in the *Laws* of the “titles” required to occupy the positions of authority in society.⁴³⁴ He lists seven titles: four of the titles derive from the authority of birth order or the “highborn”—for example, parents over their children, or masters over their slaves—and two of the titles derive from natural superiority—the stronger over the weak, the knowledgeable over the ignorant. Rancière points out that what these six titles share is a “hierarchy of positions” and a legitimization of this hierarchy with an appeal to the natural order.⁴³⁵ Then there is the seventh title—Chance, “the favour of heaven and fortune”.⁴³⁶ It is possible, according to Plato, to possess a title to a position of authority not because one has some superior quality, but simply because one was lucky, blessed by the gods. And, importantly for Rancière, this seventh title is linked by Plato to

⁴³³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 17.

⁴³⁴ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 39.

⁴³⁵ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 40.

⁴³⁶ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 40.

democracy. The democratic institution of the drawing of lots that was established in Athens, is a manifestation of this seventh title: it is Chance who selects those who will govern in the Athenian democracy. This means that those who govern are not selected by some procedure—whether tradition or elections—which tries to elevate those ‘best suited’ or ‘most qualified’ for the job of governing. Instead, the drawing of lots, the method of chance, often rewards those with no qualification at all. Therefore, according to Rancière, this seventh title is properly the title that is “the absence of title”.⁴³⁷

Moreover, it breaks the pattern established by the other titles: it does not sustain a hierarchy based on an appeal to the natural order. Instead it disjoins “entitlements to govern from any analogy to those that order social relations, from any analogy between human convention and the order of nature”.⁴³⁸ The seventh title establishes a ‘superiority’ “based on no other title than the very absence of superiority”.⁴³⁹ Again, what Rancière finds in Plato’s discussion of the seventh title is a link between anarchy and democracy, or, put otherwise, between two kinds of equality: an anarchic equality and a social equality of the community. Indeed, like the ‘freedom’ of the demos, the seventh title not only signifies the absence of qualification, but it undermines the claims of all the previous titles. It disrupts their claims to be derived from the natural order by exposing the role of chance and by creating a ‘superiority’ from an absence of qualification. As Rancière explains, the seventh title “produces a retroactive effect on the others, a doubt concerning the legitimacy of the law they lay claim to”.⁴⁴⁰ Or again, it challenges the

⁴³⁷ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 41.

⁴³⁸ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 41.

⁴³⁹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 41.

⁴⁴⁰ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 44.

seemingly natural “power of forms of authority that govern the social body”.⁴⁴¹ In this sense, the seventh title is profoundly anarchic.

However, and this is the key, rather than associating this anarchic power with the dissolving of all social bonds, it is associated by Plato with democracy. More particularly in this case, it is associated with the democratic institution of the drawing of lots. What is important about this is not only that the drawing of lots—which Rancière claims is the essence of democracy⁴⁴²—establishes a seventh title to authority within the community, but that this title manifests a particular form of equality. For again, insofar as the seventh title is the absence of title it reveals “the power of anyone at all”.⁴⁴³ In the random act of the drawing of lots, it demonstrates the equality of everyone and anyone to be selected to govern. However, the drawing of lots is also an institution that favours the demos, those *without* qualification. Indeed, although the seventh title demonstrates an equality between everyone, it is also a title “peculiar to those who have no more entitlements to govern than to submit”.⁴⁴⁴ Therefore, the seventh title evokes a democratic power in two senses: first, it reveals “the power of anyone at all”, which is the other side of the contingency exposed by the dissolving of all standards; and second, it reveals the particular power of those without qualification. The seventh title is both the title of a basic equality of everyone and a title especially for those who have nothing else.

We can see in these two analyses how Rancière finds a way of thinking a social expression of equality that neither dissolves into an anarchic equality of individuals, nor

⁴⁴¹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 45.

⁴⁴² Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 47.

⁴⁴³ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 49.

⁴⁴⁴ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 47.

establishes a stable equality within the community that creates its own hierarchies and exclusions. In part, this is again accomplished through a simple translation of freedom into equality. For example, Rancière often highlights “the sheer contingency of any social order”,⁴⁴⁵ or the “anarchy or an ‘indistinction’”,⁴⁴⁶ underpinning any social order. However, it is clear that for him these phrases are all synonymous with the equality of anyone and everyone.⁴⁴⁷ The fact that there are no stable and legitimate justifications for the inequalities in a social order signals to him the “real ultimate equality upon which any social order rests”.⁴⁴⁸ Thus, terms such as “empty freedom” or “contingency” are translated by Rancière into “empty equality”⁴⁴⁹ or “egalitarian contingency”.⁴⁵⁰ Rancière extends, therefore, the idea he discovered in Jacotot: not only can the contingency of language be interpreted as evidence of the equality of intelligences between individuals, but so too can the contingency of the social order be interpreted as evidence of the equality between different parts of the community.

However, beyond this straightforward translation from “empty freedom” to “empty equality”, what Rancière finds in the Ancients is a way to borrow the power of an anarchic freedom and infuse it into a *social* expression of equality. For instance, the manifestation of the anarchic challenge of the equality of anyone and everyone instigates a conflict and maintains an openness within the community, which prevents the settling and demarking equality once and for all. And, in turn, this inspires further disputes over, and demonstrations of, equality. Therefore, Rancière discovers in the Ancients a way to

⁴⁴⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 25.

⁴⁴⁶ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 94.

⁴⁴⁷ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 47-49.

⁴⁴⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

⁴⁴⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 34.

⁴⁵⁰ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 94.

use the power of anarchic freedom to give this expression of equality within the social order more life.

Furthermore, it is with this suspended social expression of equality that Rancière also moves away from a simple overlap between a problematic of freedom and authority and a problematic of equality and inequality. As was already noted, the equality manifested in the ‘freedom’ of the demos or the seventh title, mobilizes and expresses, in particular, the equality of those who without qualification, or in his terms “the part with no part”.⁴⁵¹ In so doing, it creates an avenue for dispute over the injustices done to those who are of no account, and it creates a bond between these people and the rest of the community. Quite simply, a tangible, measurable, and disputable equality is created within the social order. As Rancière’s describes, this is done “by uniting in the name of whatever social group the pure empty quality of equality between anyone and everyone, and by superimposing over the [social] order that structures the community another community that only exists through and for the conflict, a community based on the conflict over the very existence of something in common between those who have a part and those who have none”.⁴⁵² Thus, it is not only that Rancière finds a way to incorporate the power of an anarchic freedom into a social expression of equality, but that he finds a way to think the institutionalization of, an albeit fraught and disputed, equality within the community. In this sense, then, Rancière’s understanding of this contentious equality brings together both ‘anarchic freedom’ and ‘social authority’.

⁴⁵¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

⁴⁵² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35.

We can see this most clearly in Rancière’s attempts to outline his understanding of politics. Indeed, Rancière’s rethinking of politics blends the form or structure of the contentious social expression of equality that he finds in the Ancients with his earlier rethinking of emancipation alongside Jacotot. In the next few pages, I will offer a brief account of Rancière’s understanding of politics to show how this blending occurs, but also to highlight the key features of his understanding. For instance, one of Rancière’s central claims is that politics must be distinguished from what we normally consider it to be—an activity of ruling or governing. According to Rancière, the activity of ruling and governing involves policing not politics. Under the concept of ‘the police’ he includes all those practices of government and society at large that attempt to make institutions work, make people get along, make all parts of society function smoothly, etc. These practices of policing—whether they are enabling or oppressive—work because they draw upon the authority of a particular ordering of places and capabilities, a particular representation of society to itself, or, in his words, a particular “partition” or “distribution of the sensible”.⁴⁵³ Indeed, Rancière’s concept of the “police” is an extension of his concept of the “distribution of the sensible”—a concept that is absolutely central his writings. More precisely, the “police” is Rancière’s term for the order or law which upholds a particular distribution of the sensible.⁴⁵⁴

To elaborate, Rancière argues that all societies rely on a count, logic, or distribution which allots everyone a place in society—although some people are so low in this hierarchy that their place is one of exclusion, the “part with no part”.⁴⁵⁵ A person or

⁴⁵³ Rancière, “Ten Theses On Politics”, Thesis 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29.

⁴⁵⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 14.

group's place is then associated with certain jobs, certain ways of living, certain forms of speech, certain modes of interacting, and certain capacities for thought and action.⁴⁵⁶ In any society there is an overall order of appearances that links people to places, and places to ways of being. This overall order which upholds a particular distribution of the sensible is what Rancière means by the police. The police is made up of the practices and the logics that govern who can be seen, what can be heard, what seems possible, etc.; as he describes it, it is “an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another is noise.”⁴⁵⁷

Moreover, Rancière claims that for a society to run smoothly, the police’s distribution of places and capabilities must appear to be all that exists. So, whatever the distribution of the sensible is—whether it be of a highly stratified society of monarchical rule or a modern society of competing group interests—its own image of community must be reinforced. At times this may involve oppressive tactics, but most often the police is legitimized through the discourses, images and appeals that highlight some things and mask others. What this means is that the police should not be thought of as simply a system of oppression. It is certainly a coercive force in some ways at some times, but it is also the logic that enables all those organizational institutions and practices of rule that are necessary for any society to function.⁴⁵⁸ To sum up, the police is not only law and government, but the expression of a society to itself. It is the distribution

⁴⁵⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 28.

⁴⁵⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29.

⁴⁵⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29.

of ways of being, doing and saying upon which all the mechanisms that make societies work rely.

In contrast, politics is an activity which disrupts, questions, or challenges the police and its authoritative distribution of the sensible. Politics disturbs the police: the order of appearances, the image the community has of itself, the logic of places and capabilities. Politics is, in Rancière's words, "first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable".⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, it is a process which intervenes in the day-to-day functioning of police practices with a declaration and demonstration of equality. Politics initiates an "open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being and by the concern to test this equality".⁴⁶⁰ More precisely still, Rancière argues that what distinguishes politics from other demonstrations of equality is the specific way it targets an inequality of the police. The specificity of politics lies in the 'disagreement' it sets up with the police. It is here that Rancière's analysis of the Ancients is crucial. He writes:

Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part. This institution is the whole of politics as a specific form of connection. It defines the common of the community as a political community, in other words, as divided, as based on a wrong that escapes the arithmetic of exchange and reparation. Beyond this set-up there is no politics. There is only the order of domination or the disorder of revolt.⁴⁶¹

Politics is thus this "specific form of connection"—a contentious social expression of equality, which harnesses the anarchic power of the equality of anyone and everyone in the name of those wronged by the injustice of a social order.

Importantly, however, we can think of this 'disagreement' in more than one register. Following the Ancients, we can think of it playing out between different "parts"

⁴⁵⁹ Rancière, *Ten Theses On Politics*, Thesis 7.

⁴⁶⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.

⁴⁶¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 12.

of the community, but we can also think of it playing out within language, within our sense of self. These different registers are all at stake within politics: take, for instance a claim made a few decades ago that women are not inferior creatures meant to be kept in the home, but are human beings capable of work, thought and action. According to Rancière's understanding of politics, such a declaration latches onto a specific contradiction of the police—a “wrong”—in order both to denounce this contradiction and demonstrate the possibility of another alternative.⁴⁶² For example: how could a mother be the best judge in the home and for her children, but be incapable of good judgement outside the home? Couldn't this be seen as a contradiction? Would it not be more rational to argue either that women are not capable of good judgment anywhere, or that they were capable of good judgement everywhere? If yes, then why not assume women were capable of good judgement everywhere? Rancière describes this form of argumentation as exhibiting a “rationality of disagreement”.⁴⁶³ He claims that politics employs a rationality that takes certain claims of the police order seriously that it should not take seriously—women are capable of good judgement—and then uses these claims to argue against an inequality that exists within the police order—women can only exercise good judgement in the home whereas men can exercise good judgement anywhere. In so doing, politics opens up a space for dispute, conflict and disagreement. Where at first there was only the logic of the police—women and men have different natures, and the woman's nature is tied to the home—politics exposes and targets a gap in the logic of the police in order to create a venue to argue about men and women's natures, about their capacities for judgement, about their equality or inequality.

⁴⁶² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 13.

⁴⁶³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, xii.

Politics does not simply open up a situation, however, where a conflict with the police can be seen and heard. Politics, as we have noted, also manifests a new relation of equality. For instance, the declaration that women are not inferior creatures meant to be kept in the home is what also demonstrates women's equality with men: in making a claim, in setting up a dispute with the police, women show themselves to be creatures capable of rationality, capable of public speech, capable of dispute, etc. Within the conflict that develops with the police, women act *as if* they are the equals of men and in so doing they establish a relation of equality that did not previously exist. They perform, show, and live a new relation of equality. In fact, it is also this enactment of equality that helps to demonstrate the “wrong” of the police. It is not only that politics calls attention to a contradiction or inconsistency of the police through argument, it also calls attention to this contradiction by showing another kind of reality to exist. As Rancière writes, “the *demonstration* proper to politics is always both argument and opening up the world where argument can be received and have an impact—argument about the very existence of such a world”.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, politics establishes a stage where a dispute can be played out with the police, and this requires an enactment of an equality which simultaneously creates an equality that did not previously exist and helps to demonstrate that the police does not fully represent all that exists.

Moreover, the activity of politics itself—the staging of a disagreement and the performance of an equality—is what creates political subjects. To continue with our example, as women became involved in challenging the naturalized gender relations of the police, they also underwent a process of political subjectivization. Through their engagement in politics, there arose a new idea of what it meant to be a woman, a new

⁴⁶⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 56.

idea of what it meant to be a human, a new idea of what it meant to be a feminist—a new ‘We’. In this sense, politics produces its own subject. However, this subject is not pure, but rather conflictual and heterogeneous—political subjectivization removes people from their previously established place in the police order, it challenges this concept of place, and it suggests a new configuration that defies an easy mapping onto the existing organization of bodies and identities. The new political subjects—Woman, Feminist—for instance, are not only internally contested (What really counts as being a Woman? A Feminist?), but are also part of the conflict with the police (How can women be only wives and mothers, if we are women and are neither?) and affirm a new identity, a new relation of equality (A woman is a human being, a feminist is a person who resists patriarchy, etc.). Rancière sometimes refers to this creation of a new subjective identity as more properly a “disidentification”,⁴⁶⁵ an “in-between” subject,⁴⁶⁶ or a “the relation of a self to an other”.⁴⁶⁷ He wants to stress, in other words, that political subjects are not fixed or static identities that pre-exist politics, but rather that what distinguishes politics, and thus political subjectification, is that it challenges our normal identities and categorizations at the same time as affirming some new identity or some new relationship. One way to understand this is that the political subject is a part of the drama of politics itself: political subjects are sites where the conflicts and manifestations of politics play out.

Thus, the “specific form of connection” that Rancière highlights in the Ancients, manifests itself in politics in multiple forms: it can be expressed in a conflict over different ‘parts’ of the community, it can be expressed in a conflict over different

⁴⁶⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36.

⁴⁶⁶ Rancière, “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization”, 68.

⁴⁶⁷ Rancière, “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization”, 66.

explanations or arguments, and it can be expressed in a conflict over different identities. In fact, the “specific form of connection” that politics sets up necessarily challenges the stable categorizations of the community, of language and of identity. The contingency or ‘basic freedom’ of the community, language and identity will be inevitably be expressed and mobilized through a new demonstration of equality. It is easy to see the connection between a destabilization of the community and a destabilization of identity: how can one challenge the demarcations between different ‘parts’ of the community, without also challenging what marks people for membership within these different parts? But why is the contingency of language necessarily at stake within a politics? In part, for the simple reason that the disputes of politics are expressed through language. As well as for the reason that the disputes of politics are always *over* language: at stake, is the language itself that legitimizes, designates and categorizes. However, it is also because the disputes within and over language are what express the equality at the heart of politics: the equality of speaking beings, or more precisely, the equality of intelligences.

Indeed, what is missing from Rancière’s analysis of the Ancients, and what he must bring in from Jacotot, is the “ultimate” equality at stake in politics. Rancière argues, in fact, that the Ancients “circle in on this equality quite precisely while avoiding naming it”.⁴⁶⁸ What the Ancients *do* give Rancière, as we have seen, is a way to bring together the power of the anarchic equality that underpins the social order and a social expression or institution of equality. If we follow his analysis of the Ancients closely, it is thus easy to imagine two kinds of equality: the ‘empty’ equality that underpins the social order and the ‘substantive’ expression of this equality within the social order that is accomplished through politics. However, this is somewhat misleading representation of Rancière’s

⁴⁶⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 17.

thinking. This is because, for Rancière, the ‘empty’ equality that underpins the social order is not actually empty. In other words, the equality that underpins the social order is not simply the *negative* equality of our shared lack of qualification to govern symbolized by the quality of ‘freedom’ or the role of chance. We are not simply equal because no social order is ever natural and legitimate. We are also equal in our shared capacity to speak and understand. This is what Rancière holds unto from Jacotot and integrates into his rethinking of politics: the plausible connection between the contingency of language and the equality of intelligences.

Unlike Jacotot, however, in his rethinking of politics Rancière draws a connection between all forms of contingency—including the contingency of the social order—and the equality of intelligences. This is best illustrated by a favourite example of Rancière’s, the secession of the Roman plebeians on Aventine Hill. What is important for Rancière about this tale, especially Pierre-Simon Ballanche’s telling of it, is that it highlights the “quarrel over the issue of speech itself”.⁴⁶⁹ In the normal order of things, the plebeians are considered to be incapable of speech, or, more precisely, capable only of “transitory speech, a speech that is a fugitive sound, a sort of lowing, a sign of want and not an expression of intelligence”.⁴⁷⁰ When they secede, however, to Aventine hill,

They [...] execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians: they pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of their number to go and consult *their* oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them. In a word, they conduct themselves like beings with names. Through transgression, they find that they too, just like speaking beings, are endowed with speech that does not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence.⁴⁷¹

The patricians’ emissary Menenius decides that his only option is to speak to the plebeians as equals, as human beings capable of understanding and formulating speech.

⁴⁶⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 23.

⁴⁷⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 24.

⁴⁷¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 24-25.

He delivers his apologia. And in this moment a “common stage” is set up between the plebeians and the patricians: their equality as speaking beings is manifested in the communication between them. It is this show of equality between the plebeians and Menenius that initiates a political dispute. It creates a situation where the ‘equality’ between the plebeians and patricians can be debated. Moreover, it is this show of equality which highlights the contingency of the Roman social order, its categorizations and legitimizations. The fact that the plebeians appear to be speaking beings just like the patricians is thus what establishes *politics*.

What this makes clear is that for Rancière the social expression of equality that takes place in politics not only harnesses the power of an anarchic equality, but creates a space for testing and verifying the equality of intelligences expressed between speaking beings. Whereas Jacotot was convinced that this equality could only be tested between individuals, Rancière insists that it can also be tested between different ‘parts’ of the community. In fact, according to Rancière, all politics hinges on the testing of this equality. However, unlike the example on Aventine Hill, in most cases politics will only raise the question of the equality of speaking beings or the equality of intelligences indirectly.⁴⁷² A demonstration of the equality of intelligences will be played upon to mobilize some more specific dispute with the police, such as the equality of women with men. Nonetheless, as he stresses, “the fundamental political question [is] that of the competence of the ‘incompetent’, of the capacity of anybody at all to judge the relations between individuals and the collectivity, present and future”.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 22.

⁴⁷³ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 83.

We can see, then, why language is always at stake in politics for Rancière: our shared capacity for language, and what this shared capacity means, is always at the core of a political conflict. Language is the channel through which our equality as thinking beings can be verified. This insistence on the centrality of the question of what our shared capacity to speak means highlights a ‘political’ move on Rancière’s part. He could have easily left his understanding of politics more general, his understanding of equality emptier. But instead he deliberately chose to integrate into his rethinking of politics Jacotot’s deductions concerning the possibility of the equality of intelligences. To be clear, it is not that Rancière insists that the equality that humans share *is* the equality of intelligences, but rather that the ‘fact’ of our shared capacity for language makes such a radical equality possible to consider. Our shared capacity for language can be mobilized to demonstrate various expressions of equality that are deeply disruptive to the social order. Thus, Rancière not only finds in his re-reading of the Ancients a way to think a politically efficacious form of emancipation, he also finds a way to make politics always also about the equality of intelligences.

Consequences of Equality:

We have seen, then, how in Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation and politics that it is his decision to take up the possibility that our basic freedom can be interpreted as evidence of the equality of intelligences which instigates his shift from a problematic of freedom and authority to a problematic of equality and inequality. In turn, it is this shift towards a problematic of equality and inequality, which helps Rancière address his own

particular concerns with emancipation and politics: first, how do people come to be emancipated, and second, how can one have a politics that is both radical and not authoritarian. In fact, thought through a lens of equality our thinking of emancipation and politics can avoid some of the pitfalls found in the problematic of freedom and authority. Rather than emancipation being understood as a process that frees the ignorant and misguided from an oppressive social authority, emancipation can be thought of as a freeing experience which accompanies the enactment and verification of equality. Similarly, rather than having to choose between a politics which frees us from an oppressive authority but has no lasting influence or a politics which institutes a new and improved authority despite the consequences, politics can be thought of as a process that demonstrates and stages a contentious social equality that at once creates a community and challenges the existing one. Thus, thought through equality, emancipation and politics displace to a certain extent the problematic of freedom and authority.

The emergence of a problematic of equality and inequality, however, is also important for two other related preoccupations of Rancière's: first, his preoccupation with the role of the intellectual and the problem this poses for his own method; and second, his preoccupation with the problem of ideology. In both cases, Rancière's commitment to the equality of intelligences and his rethinking of emancipation and politics that follows, shape his approach.

In fact, if we pay attention to Rancière's method it is clear that his insistence on the centrality of the equality of intelligences is something he emphasizes not only in the 'content' of his writing but also in its 'form'. Indeed, we can see Rancière's commitment to the equality of intelligences reflected in his method. In his later writings, Rancière

claims that he tried to develop a “method of equality specifically aimed at detecting and highlighting the operations of equality that may occur everywhere at every time”.⁴⁷⁴ To highlight “operations of equality”, however, required that Rancière trouble his own elite status as ‘the intellectual’ in his writing. He needed his writings to demonstrate that ultimately “no positive boundary separates those who are fit for thinking from those who are not fit for thinking”.⁴⁷⁵ In early works, like *Proletarian Nights* or *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière tried to tackle this by writing in such a way that the hierarchical distinction between his voice as ‘the intellectual’ and the voice of his ‘objects of study’ was troubled. As Rancière notes in retrospect about *Proletarian Nights*, this book “introduces us directly into the speech of these workers, in all its forms, from personal confidence or the recital of daily experience through to philosophical speculations and programs for the future, by way of the fictitious stories recorded in their journals. It does not accept any difference of status, any hierarchy between description, fiction, or argument”.⁴⁷⁶ The workers voices “had to be removed from their status as evidence or symptoms of a social reality to show them as writing and thinking at work on the construction of a different social world”.⁴⁷⁷ Put simply, the workers had to be seen as exercising the same intelligence as himself as ‘the intellectual’ interpreting their words.

Although in many of his later writings Rancière is not engaged in presenting the writings of his ‘objects of study’ as examples of intelligences at work like his own, he nonetheless wishes to remind his readers that his own reflections are not grand theories

⁴⁷⁴ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 280-281.

⁴⁷⁵ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 282.

⁴⁷⁶ Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, x

⁴⁷⁷ Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, xi

but merely his own attempts to make sense of the world.⁴⁷⁸ To accomplish this, his writings are often presented as poetic and polemical interventions inspired by certain texts or current debates.⁴⁷⁹ The creative nature and openness of these interventions is not obscured by Rancière, but rather emphasized so as to highlight the general possibility of such interventions. In all his writings, therefore, there is a desire to demonstrate the equality of the intellectual's intelligence with everyone else's. To do this, however, requires that his writings work against the intellectual's traditional role in the problematic of freedom and authority as the enlightener of the ignorant and the demystifier of reality.

To enact this displacement of 'the intellectual' in his writings requires, in fact, the same kind of redistribution of the sensible that occurs in emancipation or politics. Just as emancipation requires a "reframing" space and time and politics is "first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable", writing for Rancière is also about redistributing the sensible.⁴⁸⁰ As he writes,

This is the main intuition underpinning Rancière's 'method': there is not, on the one hand, 'theory' which explains things and, on the other hand, practice educated by the lessons of theory. There are configurations of sense, knots tying together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations and movements. What he does himself is to construct a moving map of a moving landscape, a map that is ceaselessly modified by the movement itself. This is why, indeed, his 'concepts' are instable: police and politics, distribution of the sensible, aesthetics, literature, etc. don't mean the same thing from the beginning of the travel to the end; firstly because the travel is a fight too, a multi-waged fight where the emphasis can be put on different aspects; secondly because the travel – or the fight – continuously discovers new landscapes, paths or obstacles which oblige to reframe the conceptual net used to think where we are.⁴⁸¹

And, of course, just like emancipation or politics part of what Rancière hopes his effort to construct a "moving map" will help demonstrate is the equality of intelligences. So, for example, his own writings hope to redistribute our understanding of things in such a way

⁴⁷⁸ Rancière, "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière", 114.

⁴⁷⁹ Rancière, "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière", 116.

⁴⁸⁰ Rancière, "Afterword/The Method of Equality", 276 and Rancière, *Ten Theses on Politics*, Thesis 7.

⁴⁸¹ Rancière, "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière", 120.

as to both disrupt the hierarchy of intelligences and make the equality of intelligences appear possible. As we have seen, Rancière attempts to do this both by arguing that it is possible to interpret the basic freedom or contingency of our social world as evidence of the equality of intelligences, and by demonstrating the equality of intelligence between himself as ‘the intellectual’ and his objects of study or his readers in the way that he presents his writings. However, Rancière also hopes that the mode of writing itself might contribute to others’ efforts to redistribute the sensible. He remarks,

As [Plato] conceived it, writing meant the wrong circuit on which words are launched as orphans, available to anybody, without being guided by the voice of the master who knows how they have to be related to things and also who is entitled or not entitled to make an appropriate use of them. In my terms, writing—and its other side, reading—is a redistribution of the sensible. Writing frees words from a given relation between signs and bodies. By so doing it blurs the distinction between gold and iron and it makes this mix-up available to anybody.⁴⁸²

Thus, writing’s distance from its author and audience means that it can encourage the act of redistribution indirectly: anyone who can read can interpret the words on the page can decide and communicate what the words mean. In this sense, then, writing can encourage others’ emancipation, it can encourage others’ to assume their shared capacity to “redistribute sensible”. To be sure, the fact that writing demands interpretation from its readers without the presence of the ‘author’ is no guarantee of emancipation, as no reader must assume their capacity is shared equally by others. Nevertheless, writing (and reading) do make more explicit the act of interpretation which, following Jacotot, is one of the basic exercises in which the equality of intelligences can be seen. Thus, a piece of writing can highlight explicitly our shared capacity to redistribute experience and it can encourage this shared capacity to redistribute implicitly given the nature of its impersonal and detached form. In this way, writing can encourage emancipation.

⁴⁸² Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 278.

Accordingly, in this schema an intellectual no longer emancipates his readers by freeing them from their misperceptions and showing them the truth; instead an intellectual can write in such a way that our shared capacity to think or “redistribute” or “be emancipated” is seen. In this way, Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation and politics shapes his understanding of his method and his role as an intellectual. In fact, it is clear that his concept of the redistribution of the sensible forms a common link between his rethinking of emancipation and politics and his method. And, again, this common link emphasizes his interpretation of ‘freedom’ as ‘equality’. It is the ‘freedom’ that exists between words and meaning, between our social legitimations and human capacities, between the author, the written word and the reader, which can be seen, according to Rancière, as evidence of the equality of intelligences. In two senses: the existence of this basic freedom or openness requires intelligences to do the work of bridging the divide, and this basic freedom or openness points to the possibility of words, things and bodies being linked otherwise. As such, Rancière connects his idea of the redistribution of the sensible explicitly to the equality of intelligences and the political possibilities this holds.

Therefore, we can see that for Rancière there is an intimate connection between his idea of redistributing the sensible, his commitment to the equality of intelligences, his rethinking of politics and emancipation, and his method. In addition, as should not be surprising, together these ideas also give Rancière a different way to think about the problem of ideology. As Rancière admits at one point, in his writings he has been preoccupied with “a new understanding of what Marxist theory had put under the concept of ideology”.⁴⁸³ However, whereas ideology is conventionally a problem of the problematic of freedom and authority—people must be freed from their oppressive

⁴⁸³ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 274.

misconceptions of reality in order to be able to change that reality—with his concept of the distribution of the sensible, I would argue that Rancière translates the problem of ideology into the problematic of equality and inequality. For example, according to Rancière, the logic of ideology states that: “people are exploited and oppressed because they don’t know the law of their exploitation or oppression. They have wrong representations of what they are and why they are so. And they have those wrong representations of their place because the place where they are confined hinders them from seeing the structure that allots them that place.”⁴⁸⁴ The trick is then how to bring to true knowledge to the people in order to free them.

What Rancière’s concept of the distribution of the sensible retains from this concept of ideology is its connection between people’s oppression and a social structure that “allots them that place”. However, Rancière tends not to refer to ‘oppression’ but rather to a distribution of capacities. He writes, “what a distribution of the sensible means [is] a relation between occupations and equipment, between being in a specific space and time, performing specific activities, and being endowed with capacities of seeing, saying and doing that ‘fit’ those activities. A distribution of the sensible is a matrix that defines a set of relations between sense and sense: that is between a form of sensory experience and an interpretation that makes sense of it”.⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, *unlike* ideology what is emphasized is not specific groups’ oppression but rather the unequal distribution of roles. However, *like* ideology this unequal distribution of roles will be linked to different capacities and different ways of seeing and thinking. Thus, what a person believes is still fundamentally at stake—how they see, understand and interpret the world. However,

⁴⁸⁴ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 275.

⁴⁸⁵ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 275.

whereas within the logic of ideology the object is to free a person from his or her misguided beliefs, within the logic of the distribution of the sensible the object is merely to suggest that it is possible to operate according to *different* beliefs. It is possible to operate, in other words, according to equality.

In fact, this is where Rancière's disassociation between emancipation and knowledge plays such a pivotal role. What traps people is not their ignorance, incapacity or illusions, but their continued performance of inequality. As Rancière writes, "Inequality has to be performed by those who endure it as their life, as what they feel, what they are aware of".⁴⁸⁶ If a person operates *as if* they are unequal, then they will continue to demonstrate their incapacity. However, if a person acts *as if* they are equal, then they can not only demonstrate their capacity, but they can also subvert the particular distribution of the sensible which allotted them their place and its corresponding incapacities.⁴⁸⁷ One is 'freed' from the authority of a distribution of the sensible through a demonstration of equal capacity that is nonsensical within its frame. Thus, Rancière's rethinking of the problem of ideology through his concept of the distribution of the sensible maintains as a backdrop, as it were, the Platonic opposition between freedom and authority. The idea that "how we think" is connected to "what we do" and that both can be oppressive is retained, but instead of the focus being the discovery and communication of a knowledge that frees, the focus becomes changing "what we do". In other words, if relationships of equality are manifested and verified then it is these efforts to demonstrate equality that will "free" or more precisely *shift* how we think.

Accordingly, it is not that questions of knowledge become irrelevant in Rancière's

⁴⁸⁶ Rancière, "Afterword/The Method of Equality", 275.

⁴⁸⁷ Rancière, "Afterword/The Method of Equality", 277.

rethinking of ideology, it is rather that the question shifts from “what knowledge frees?” to “who is qualified for thinking at all?” As he remarks, “This question, he thinks, is ultimately what is at stake in the war of discourses which is the field of ‘theoretical’ practice.”⁴⁸⁸

It is clear then that Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation and politics have important consequences for his thinking about the role of the intellectual and his method, as well as his thinking about the problem of ideology. In each case, it is his shift to a problematic of equality and inequality that seems to open up different ways of formulating these crucial problems of politics and education. Finally, it is also clear that this shift contains at its core a fundamentally political move: an insistence that ‘freedom’ can be seen as evidence of equality. Unfortunately, however, many of Rancière’s interpreters ignore this move and the shift it initiates. In fact, although all Rancière’s interpreters acknowledge his emphasis on equality, they do not draw our attention to the centrality of his commitment to the equality of intelligences. The consequences of this are, first, that his shift to a problematic of equality and inequality is not seen; and, second, that the radical political nature of his writings is ignored.

In relation to the first of these points, in the context of the grip that the problematic of freedom and authority has on our thinking, if Rancière shift to equality is not seen this results in analyses of Rancière’s writings being pulled back into a problematic of freedom and authority. Briefly, for example, a common criticism of Rancière’s thinking of politics is that it is purely disruptive and fails to think the problem of political organization or practice. For instance, Badiou writes: “Rancière fails to say that every political process, even in the sense in which he understands it, manifests itself

⁴⁸⁸ Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière”, 114.

in an organised process”.⁴⁸⁹ Or as Hallward summarizes: “Rancière’s emphasis on division and interruption makes it difficult to account for qualities that are just as fundamental to any sustainable political sequence: organization, simplification, mobilization, decision, polarization, to name a few”.⁴⁹⁰ At one level this is an accurate critique, given that Rancière himself claims that thinking through the problems of political organization has never been his interest. As he underscores in a recent article, his aim has never been to set “the principles for political practice”.⁴⁹¹ Or, as he explains in a recent interview: “I don’t think there are rules for good militant organisation. If there were, we’d already have applied them and we’d certainly be further along than we are at the moment”.⁴⁹²

However, some of his critics take the fact that Rancière does not outline what he considers the best methods of political organization to mean that he is *against* political organization altogether. Or, to be more precise, they characterize his understanding of politics as *purely* anarchic and disruptive. For example, Nina Power remarks: “Rancière’s equality remains firmly on the side of disruption, which might make it purely a question of subversion for its own sake”.⁴⁹³ Or, as Slavoj Žižek describes: “Rancière opts for a *political* mode of rebellion against the universal police/political order”.⁴⁹⁴ Similarly, Hallward asserts that of Rancière’s various reflections on the implications of equality

⁴⁸⁹ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 121.

⁴⁹⁰ Hallward, “Staging Equality”, 155.

⁴⁹¹ Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière”, 120.

⁴⁹² Jacques Rancière and Peter Hallward, “Politics and Aesthetics: an interview” trans. Forbes Morlock in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* Vol. 8, no. 2, (2003), 200.

⁴⁹³ Nina Power, “Which Equality? Badiou and Rancière in Light of Ludwig Feuerbach” *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009) 66.

⁴⁹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: the Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (Verso: London and New York, 1999), 172.

“the most significant and consistent of these [is that it is] essentially anarchic”.⁴⁹⁵ Even Christian Ruby in his introductory text to Rancière’s political thinking chooses to entitle his book: “L’interruption”.⁴⁹⁶

As Sam Chambers has argued in a recent article, “Interpreters have been tempted to read Rancière as proffering a formally pure conception of politics, wherein politics is ultimately separate from and in utter opposition to all police orders.”⁴⁹⁷ In contrast, Chambers suggests that politics is “impure” or “multiple”.⁴⁹⁸ Against interpreters like Todd May, he argues that Rancière’s political thinking does not fall into the “Manichean” distinction between a purely disruptive politics of spontaneity and freedom on the one hand, and an oppressive authoritarian order of “police” on the other.⁴⁹⁹ He writes:

Impurity is, by definition, never simple. And the impurity of politics produces a paradox for Rancière’s thought. On the one hand, politics must not be pure. On the other, politics as that which disrupts the police order must somehow remain ‘other’ to that order; this is why the ‘blending’ is never a merging. For the disruptive force of politics to be preserved, it must somehow remain external to the police order that it would disrupt. Yet politics as pure ‘externality’ would preclude the necessary ‘meeting of the heterogeneous’ that enacts politics. Hence, politics must be other to police, but not purely other. The key to responding to this paradox is to refuse to overcome it. Instead, Rancière’s theory of politics must be understood as thinking the paradox, as capturing its flavour and mobilizing its force, rather than attempting to erase or resolve it.⁵⁰⁰

Clearly, therefore, the argument I am making fits in with Chambers’ minority interpretation of Rancière’s political thinking that stresses, alongside Rancière himself, that he has never been interested in “the worn-out and pointless discussions about spontaneity and organization”.⁵⁰¹ However, what Chambers does not stress in his analysis

⁴⁹⁵ Peter Hallward, “Staging Equality: On Rancière’s Theatrocracy” *New Left Review* Vol. 37, (2006), 110.

⁴⁹⁶ Christian Ruby, *L’interruption* La Fabrique: Paris, 2009. He refers to Rancière’s politics as “la politique a l’interruption”, 113.

⁴⁹⁷ Samuel Chambers. “Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics” *The European Journal of Political Theory* Vol. 10 no. 3 (2011), 303.

⁴⁹⁸ Chambers, “Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics”, 305.

⁴⁹⁹ Chambers, “Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics”, 310.

⁵⁰⁰ Chambers, “Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics”, 310.

⁵⁰¹ Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière”, 118.

is the connection between Rancière's more nuanced position and his shift to a problematic of equality and inequality. Given this, he does not highlight Rancière's own way of "thinking the paradox" and thus we cannot explore the possibilities that a problematic of equality and inequality may open up. However, perhaps more worryingly, the common critique of Rancière's "anarchic" politics seems to ignore Rancière's attempt to think this "paradox" of politics at all. This contributes not only to the extension of "worn-out and pointless discussions" but also to a characterization of his political thinking that is misleading.

Second, the failure to note the centrality of Rancière's commitment to the equality of intelligences in his thinking also leads to the political radicality of this commitment becoming obscured. In fact, it is not hard to imagine all the reasons why his scholarly interpreters might want to avoid dwelling on his particular emphasis on the equality of intelligences. Indeed, even those who note the importance of the equality of intelligences for Rancière, often downplay its political radicality. One example of an attempt to underplay the equality of intelligences, which is even more telling because of his general sympathy with Rancière, can be found Todd May's article "Rancière in South Carolina", a shorter version of his book *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality*. In this article, May wants to use Rancière's political thought to help him explore an incident in Clemson, South Carolina that ignited racial tensions in the city. In particular, May focuses on Rancière's idea that politics "is about the presupposition of equality"⁵⁰². Like we have done, May traces back this idea that politics is about the presupposition of equality to Rancière's exploration of Jacotot and in particular Jacotot's

⁵⁰² Todd May, "Rancière in South Carolina," in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 108.

declaration that all intelligences are equal.⁵⁰³ However, May clearly wants to distance himself from a literal interpretation of this declaration: he does not want readers to think he actually believes that all intelligences are equal. So, for instance, he makes sure to underscore, albeit correctly, that Rancière never argues that people *are* equally intelligent; he simply suggests that it is a possible presupposition to work from.⁵⁰⁴

Even more importantly, however, May reinterprets what is meant by the equality of intelligences in the first place. He writes,

What does it mean to presuppose that people are equally intelligent? This has nothing to do with standardized tests or with the ability to do advanced math or physics. Instead, it has to do with the ability of people to shape their lives. Everyone, we might say, unless they are damaged in some way, is capable of creating a meaningful life.[...] Each of us is capable of meeting the challenges life puts before us, without appeal to an authority that must guide us through our own ignorance.⁵⁰⁵

What we see in this passage is an effort by May to interpret the declaration of the equality of intelligences as simply another declaration of the fundamental liberal tenet that we are all the best governors of our own lives. May wants the equality of intelligences to mean that we are all equally capable of “meeting the challenges life puts before us”. This is not, however, how Rancière mobilizes the equality of intelligences. For Rancière, the equality of intelligences is meant as a *literal* presupposition, a *literal* possibility that all intelligences are equal: what if we operated in teaching and in the world *as if* we were all, really and truly, equally intelligent; in other words, if we operated precisely on the assumption that we are all equally capable of learning any subject matter, including “advanced math or physics”? What if we believed that there were not people who were ‘just smarter’—and thus might deserve more riches, power, voice, say, etc.—but that in

⁵⁰³ May, “Rancière in South Carolina”, 111.

⁵⁰⁴ May, “Rancière in South Carolina”, 112.

⁵⁰⁵ May, “Rancière in South Carolina”, 111.

fact anyone was capable of learning anything? What would this assumption of the equality of intelligence do? What other hierarchies of the social order would it threaten?

Indeed, it is this literal version of the equality of intelligences that makes it political disruptive. In *Proletarian Nights* for instance, Rancière emphasizes that the radical move that workers like Gabriel Gauny made was to assume that they too could be artists, poets, philosophers, etc. It was precisely their not keeping to their proper place as workers—beings only capable of creating through the toil of their bodies—by asserting their equality as intellectual beings, which challenged the social order.⁵⁰⁶ Otherwise, if all the equality of intelligence is taken to mean is that people are equally capable of leading their own lives, there is no suggestion that workers can ever be anything more than workers. To be sure, they can be free to lead their lives as they see fit *as workers*, and perhaps even demand better conditions *as workers*, but they cannot be artists or intellectuals. Thus, if we follow May's interpretation, in today's liberal societies at least, there is no fundamental challenge to the categorization of people in the social order into those who are capable of thought and those who are incapable. And this is the particular challenge that interests Rancière, and one that I would argue is still very pertinent today in liberal democracies unlike May's interpretation which fits so nicely with common sense liberal assumptions. Indeed, if by the equality of intelligence we mean *literally* that all minds are equally capable of learning anything, then there is a challenge to the social order: workers are no longer 'just workers'—they can be, and be seen as, thinking, speaking and understanding beings.

Therefore, May's attempt to distance himself from any literal interpretation of the equality of intelligences suggests that he wants to avoid any accusation that he is stupid

⁵⁰⁶ Rancière, "Afterword/Method of Equality", 275.

or ridiculous enough to believe that all intelligences are equal. This feeling that the presupposition of the equality of intelligences if taken literally is ridiculous, can be interpreted as testifying to two different phenomena: on the one hand, that, despite all sorts of egalitarian sympathies, we intellectuals are deeply invested in the hierarchy of intelligences; and, on the other hand, that the equality of intelligence is a very powerful possibility that, if mobilized, might have all sorts of interesting consequences.

In fact, I would argue that Rancière's commitment to the equality of intelligences poses a forceful demand on his readers: on the one hand, his emphasis on the centrality of the question of equality of intelligences within politics directs our attention to the intellectual hierarchy that exists relatively untroubled in both political and educational spheres. Consider the following: our society places tremendous value on endlessly differentiated expertise; our representative democratic system is designed to select those who are 'capable' of the job of governing; social movements of various kinds often find themselves divided between a 'knowing' leadership and an 'ignorant' public; most of us have internalized analyses of our society which rely on correlations between not having an education, ignorance, criminality, violence, poverty, etc.; most of us have also internalized the distinction between abstract thought and concrete or practical thinking, the different developmental stages these apparently represent, and the superior intelligence of those 'capable' of abstract thought; in this same spirit, the popular wisdom today in many educational circles is that there are "multiple" intelligences or learning styles and one can take a test to see whether one is, for instance, more linguistic or kinetic; there are baby-teaching kits one can buy that begin preparing your baby's intelligence for "genius" while it is still in your womb; and, finally, within academia itself

there is an unquestioned assumption that we are smarter than those people out there, not to mention those in inferior disciplines!

On the other hand, besides alerting us to the myriad of ways a hierarchy of intelligences is sustained in our social order, Rancière's emphasis on the equality of intelligences demands that we actually consider its veracity. Is this assumption of the equality of intelligences still a plausible opinion to hold today despite advances in the study of the brain? Or is 'intelligence' something that still escapes direct measurement? And if it does still escape measurement, following Rancière more closely, what might become possible if we operated on the assumption of the equality of intelligences? What would be the consequences of this assumption in the different spheres of our lives? What would be challenged? What would not? What would we have to do differently?

Moreover, his emphasis on the equality of intelligences asks us to investigate whether can we see this assumption already in play in various kinds of political disputes. Is it being mobilized, and if so, how so? Is it useful for the mobilization of this equality to become more conscious? How does the centrality of this question of the equality of intelligences ask us to rethink our assumptions about the relationship between politics and education? Thus, I would argue that Rancière's insistence on the equality of intelligences is one of the most explicit political moves in his writing, and it is this move that opens up some of the most interesting political questions to consider. If we ignore the importance of the equality of intelligences in his thought, therefore, not only are we likely to miss the shift to a problematic of equality and inequality that his commitment initiates, but we are likely to miss the political challenge it poses for us all.

Chapter 5: Thinking Education through Equality

How do Rancière's writings suggest a different way to think politically about education? This is the question that this final chapter will attempt to answer. To begin, we will look at how Rancière's rethinking of emancipation and politics suggests a different way to think the relationships between emancipation, politics and education. Having sketched out this general schematic, we will then turn to how his shift to a problematic of equality and inequality opens up new ways to approach the 'paradox of education'. In particular, I will argue, first, that it offers a less polarizing schematic for our political thinking about education; second, that it suggests a way to bring 'relationships' back into the focus; and third, that it suggests a new way to think about the experience of 'free thinking'. I will try to show how these consequences avoid many of the problems of the problematic of freedom and authority outlined in Chapter 2 and 3, and present a new terrain for our political thinking of education.

New Relationships: Education, Emancipation, Politics

As we saw in Chapter 4, the rethinking of politics that Rancière develops in texts like *Disagreement* and *Hatred of Democracy* sets out a clear distinction between 'politics' and the 'police'. This distinction is important for Rancière because, as he argues, it helps us think 'politics' apart from all the activities involved in governing and making a society work.⁵⁰⁷ By separating 'politics' from the 'police' one is able to appreciate what is unique to both sets of 'political' activities: challenging the distribution of roles and capacities on the one hand, and ordering and sustaining these roles and capacities on the other. Both sets of activities are, at one level, desirable and necessary. Interestingly, if we begin with

⁵⁰⁷ Rancière, "Dissenting Words", 119.

this distinction between ‘politics’ and the ‘police’, it enables us to make a similar distinction between the different functions of education. So, for example, I would argue that one can have education that challenges the distribution of roles and capacities in a social order and one can have education that orders and sustains these roles.

In fact, I would argue that most of the time education is a practice of the police. In other words, it is a practice aimed at reproducing society, at maintaining and furthering a particular distribution of the sensible. As Dewey’s analysis alerts us, this reproductive role of education is extremely important: we want to teach people how to belong and participate in a society. However, as so much of the literature on education reminds us, this reproductive role is also deeply worrisome as it sustains behaviours and ideas that are oppressive, hierarchical or simply “out of date”. Despite these important critiques of education’s reproductive function, it is nonetheless clear that this is education’s most common role. Indeed, most of time, education’s central task is to renew and sustain the social order as it already exists.

However, it is also possible for education to be emancipatory instead of reproductive. As we saw with Jacotot’s practice of universal teaching, education can be a practice directed towards a demonstration of equality. In this case, universal teaching requires one to first assume the equality of intelligences and then learn in the process of verifying the equality of one’s intelligence with another’s. In a context where the inequality of intelligences is assumed to be self-evident, such a practice of teaching is emancipatory. Although Rancière only explores one such emancipatory practice of education in his writings, I think one can imagine many other forms that an ‘emancipatory’ practice of education could take. For example, one can imagine an

educational practice in which women seek to demonstrate their equality with men; or, one can imagine an educational practice that tries to demonstrate the equality of ‘scientific knowledge’ and ‘indigenous knowledge’; or, one can imagine an educational practice wherein ‘students’ are shown to be equally capable of deciding what is to be learnt and how to learn it as the teacher, etc. In each of these cases, a demonstration of the equality of intelligences would be at least implicitly at stake, however the ‘equality’ at issue may not be one of ‘intelligence’ specifically. Instead, just as in politics, this possibility of the equality of intelligences might be mobilized in any number of ways to assert a particular equality unrecognized in the current social order. Thus, if an educational practice involves a demonstration of a relationship of equality that is not currently recognized by the police, it is an emancipatory practice.

We can see, then, that it is possible for educational practices to mirror Rancière’s distinction between politics and the police. However, I would argue that although forms of ‘emancipatory’ education are obviously political, broadly understood, if we follow Rancière’s analysis in texts like *Disagreement* they would not necessarily count as ‘politics’ proper. This is because they do not necessarily set up a common stage for an equality to be demonstrated and for a dispute with the police to be played out. Instead, in many educational practices demonstrations of equality would manifest themselves only between teachers and students, between individual students, between members of an organization, etc. There would be no wider social dispute set up over ‘equality’. The distinction between emancipation and politics is therefore useful to maintain, because it signals that in many emancipatory educational practices, although a disputed ‘equality’ is at stake, the practices themselves remain largely removed from a public stage or

confrontation. Having said this, it is also clear that in certain circumstances an educational practice would be involved in the institution of a more public stage. Consider, for instance, the Unis'tot'en Action camp for activists and community organizers interested in lending their support to the Unis'tot'en blockade against pipeline expansion through their territories in Northern BC.⁵⁰⁸ In this case, the educational practice is part of a wider political dispute, a wider demonstration of equal capacity. Therefore, although many educational practices that are 'emancipatory' are not instances of 'politics', some educational practices clearly do set up a "common stage" for an equality to be seen and disputed.

In fact, I would argue that even if all educational practices that are 'emancipatory' are not necessarily instances of 'politics', all instances of 'politics' are necessarily accompanied by educational practices. Thus, it is not simply that some educational practices can become a part of a more public dispute, as is the case with the example above, but also that all practices of politics have educational components. Consider any social movement, for example—how can one make sense of such movements without also considering their efforts at 'education' broadly understood? However, these educational components of a practice of politics may not all be emancipatory. So, for instance, one might have an instance of politics wherein women attempt to demonstrate their equality with men, and this demonstration may involve some educational practices that are emancipatory for the particular women concerned, but accompanying this demonstration may also be educational practices directed at newcomers or outsiders which are not at all emancipatory. These latter educational practices may be engaged instead in exercises of ordering and reproducing the positions or consequences that

⁵⁰⁸ *Unis'tot'en Action Camp*, Last modified December 5th 2013, <http://unistotencamp.com>.

follow from the initial political dispute. Quite simply, not all education that accompanies politics has a demonstration of equality at its centre.

We can see that, if we follow the consequences of Rancière's distinction between 'politics' and the 'police', this opens up a new way to map out the relationship between politics and education. I have argued that two different forms of education can be distinguished—education-as-police and education-as-emancipation. However, all instances of education-as-emancipation are not 'politics' in the full sense, but all 'politics' necessarily involves education, and yet, in turn, not all this education will be emancipatory. Although this may seem convoluted, I would argue that this analytic map for thinking the relationship between politics and education is useful. First, it places 'equality' in focus in regards to education as well as politics. This focus on equality allows for a relatively straightforward definition of what counts as an emancipatory education. So, if as political thinkers we are concerned about whether or not a form of education is emancipatory, we simply must ask ourselves if a particular educational practice is engaged in a demonstration of an equality that is not recognized in the social order. If it is engaged in such a demonstration, then it is emancipatory. The focus on equality, therefore, removes the idea of an emancipatory education from the Platonic tradition, which ties emancipation to the apprehension of some kind of truth or knowledge. In order for us to determine whether an emancipatory education exists, we need not know if it has communicated the right knowledge or truth to its participants: we simply need to know if it has demonstrated an equality.

Second, this narrow definition of emancipatory education allows for us to assess the educational practices that accompany politics more honestly. Indeed, as we know,

often politics can be accompanied by quite dogmatic educational practices. However, at times these practices may seem necessary for strategic or organizational purposes. If we acknowledge that education is usually reproductive and that such reproductive education is often necessary, then this allows those engaged in politics to participate more consciously in such reproductive education. In other words, they need not pretend they are engaged in any kind of emancipatory education. And yet, at the same time, by having a clear definition of emancipatory education as a practice that must itself demonstrate equality, one also creates a test that allows these other forms of reproductive education to be critiqued.

Third, if we follow Rancière's distinction between 'police' and 'politics', then we avoid the move of Weber, Arendt and many others whose analyses present the central distinction to be one between 'politics' on the one hand and 'education' on the other. Instead, if we follow Rancière, the central distinction is not between these different (but potentially overlapping) practices, but instead between practices, whether educational or political, that are reproductive and ordering on the one hand, or are challenging and emancipatory on the other. Of course, as Chambers argues, there are also dangers in taking this distinction more seriously than Rancière himself would want, as it pushes us toward assuming that a practice of 'politics' (or education) could be "purely" emancipatory. Nevertheless, Rancière's distinction is useful not only because it refocuses our attention on 'equality', but also because it allows us to *see* how politics and education overlap. Although we may certainly want to distinguish between practices of politics and practices of education, if both practices can be thought of as either emancipatory or reproductive then it is also clear that these practices can often be the same thing. Politics

can be education, and education can be politics. The advantage of seeing this is quite simply that it encourages political thinkers to consider the educational practices that accompany politics, as well as the political problems raised by practices of education.

In fact, finally, where politics and emancipatory education overlap one finds a new definition for democratic education. Indeed, if ‘politics’ and ‘democracy’ are synonymous terms for Rancière—he argues, for example, that democracy “is the institution of politics itself”⁵⁰⁹—then when the education that accompanies a practice of politics is also emancipatory, one can have a *democratic* practice of education. In other words, if education takes on the form of politics—the staging of a contentious equality—it is a *democratic education*. The appeal of this definition of a democratic education is that it neither puts off ‘democracy’ until a later date, as do all approaches to democratic education which approach it as a form of ‘civic’ training for democratic participation in the future; nor does it subsume ‘democracy’ to particular practices such as voting or consensus decision-making, which can then be applied to establish ‘democracy’ in the classroom. In both of these cases, the practice of education is removed or shielded from the ‘political-ness’ of democracy, and this, in turn, saps democracy of some of its political potential. In contrast, this new definition of democratic education makes it unavoidably political: democratic education only exists through a public conflict with the status quo; it only exists within politics itself. A democratic education comes to mean the emancipatory educational efforts that accompany, or that are a part of the social institution of a disputed equality.

⁵⁰⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 101.

What follows, of course, is that democratic education is as least as rare as politics.⁵¹⁰ Thus, it is not something we can easily adopt or create in the classroom. This may be disappointing to some. However, the same conclusion cannot be reached about emancipatory education. If one is convinced by my argument, there are clearly any number of relations of equality that a practice of education might aim to manifest. So even if a ‘democratic education’ is rare, an emancipatory education need not be. This possibility is, one would imagine, quite suggestive for those interested in the political potential of educational practice. Moreover, the definition of ‘democratic education’ as the overlap between practices of politics and emancipatory education is also suggestive for those who study politics. Indeed, it would seem to demand that the educational side of politics be given more attention. Rather than political thinkers side-stepping questions of education within politics because it seems to threaten all hope for ‘freedom’ or ‘radical change’, this definition of democratic education—and this definition of emancipatory education—opens up room for a different kind of political approach to questions of education. To see how this is the case, however, we must unpack how Rancière’s shift to a problematic of equality and inequality reframes the ‘paradox of education’.

A Problematic of Equality and Inequality

In fact, although the distinction between education-as-police and education-as-emancipation is useful for all the reasons outlined above, it does not by itself adequately address the ‘paradox of education’. This is because the distinction between education-as-police and education-as-emancipation can too easily be pulled back into a problematic of

⁵¹⁰ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 88.

freedom and authority: on the one hand, you have education that reproduces and instills authority, and on the other hand, you have education that challenges authority and ‘frees’ its participants. If we make this move, how are we to make sense of the fact that any practice of education will necessarily involve authority? If all education involves authority, wouldn’t this suggest that all education is reproductive and therefore an emancipatory education is impossible? If we are to avoid this slip back into the grip of the problematic of freedom and authority, we must do more to emphasize the problematic of equality and inequality that emerges in Rancière’s analyses. Although the distinction between ‘politics’ and the ‘police’—or education-as-emancipation or education-as-police—can be interpreted in the terms of freedom and authority, Rancière’s writings open up a much more fruitful way of thinking these practices—as practices of equality on the one hand and practices of inequality on the other. If we insist on thinking politics and education through a lens of equality, then this distinction between ‘politics’ and ‘police’ or education-as-emancipation and education-as-police can be seen as a creating a fundamental opposition between equality and inequality, rather than freedom and authority. It is this shift in emphasis that ultimately points to a different way to approach the ‘paradox of education’.

The best way to illustrate this is through an example—let’s return again to Jacotot and his practice of universal teaching. If we approach Jacotot’s practice through a lens of freedom and authority, the ‘paradox of education’ is unavoidable: Jacotot seems to present for us an emancipatory education in which students are liberated thanks to the mastery of their teacher. It seems as if the teacher’s authority—an authority stemming from the teacher’s mastery, rather than his or her knowledge or intelligence—creates a

situation where students can realize the equality of their intelligences. Without this authority, the students' will likely not be freed from their enslavement to the belief in the hierarchy of intelligences. What is striking about Jacotot's description of universal teaching, then, is that it highlights 'the authority' involved in emancipatory education, something which most 'progressive' forms education would prefer to obscure. How are we to make sense of the presence of this authority alongside emancipation? Indeed, how are we to make sense of the fact that in Jacotot's universal teaching, the ignorant master's authority seems to be what liberates his students? Quite simply, the paradoxical connection between the teacher's authority and the students' liberation seems to demand further elaboration.

In fact, it is this paradoxical connection that first captured my imagination; and, interestingly, it is also this paradoxical connection that inspires Greco's book *Rancière et Jacotot, Une Critique du Concept D'Autorité*, and the paradox that Badiou "praises" in his article, "The Lessons of Jacques Rancière: Knowledge and Power after the Storm". What captured my and these other thinkers' imaginations was a promise, unexplored in Rancière's own texts, that he had found a way to resolve the fraught relationship between freedom and authority in education, and perhaps in politics as well. More particularly, the figure of the ignorant master seems to embody an authority that may promote and sustain emancipation rather than quash it. What Greco and Badiou both take up in their texts, then, is the promise of this particular combination of 'ignorance' and 'authority': the ignorance of the master limits his ability to set up a hierarchical relationship between the teacher who knows and the student who doesn't, and yet his authority over the students still compels the student to use his own intelligence to learn. Brought together, ignorance

and authority seem to suggest a way to think an ‘emancipatory authority’ that would have broad applications not only for our understanding of Rancière’s writings, but for education and politics more generally. As Badiou writes, at “the heart of Rancière’s work, the part of his work that formalizes those original experiences [is] the question of the political unbinding of knowledge and power constrained by the necessity of achieving something like a new type of [educational] transmission. With respect to the conceptual field itself, this question resulted in Rancière proposing a new dialectic of knowledge and ignorance, and, more generally, of mastery and equality.”⁵¹¹

Not only would I argue that this is a misleading interpretation of Rancière work, but I think this desire to pinpoint an ‘emancipatory authority’ is problematic. First, by focusing on this authority, one mutes Rancière’s most original insight—according to Badiou himself⁵¹²—that emancipation begins simply with a declaration of equality. Instead, we are drawn back into the task of finding the conditions for emancipation. The question becomes: what authority must exist for emancipation to occur? Second, in trying to define and understand this emancipatory authority, we also fall into the same trap that befalls Giroux in his attempt to outline an “emancipatory rationality” for education: dogmatism. This is because the authority of the ignorant master becomes beyond critique thanks to its connection with emancipation. How could we question that there might be an injustice in the relationship of mastery between teacher and student, even if that teacher is ignorant? Whatever inequality exists in this relationship must be justifiable if this relationship enables emancipation. In fact, if this authority is connected to emancipation, we must be able to reproduce it in different contexts, apply it in situations

⁵¹¹ Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 42.

⁵¹² Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 42.

beyond universal teaching. As Badiou writes, “I would say that Rancière has found a form for the eternal conceptualization of our naïve paradoxes.”⁵¹³ Or as Greco elaborates at greater length:

à la fin de ce parcours nous croyons qu’il est possible de continuer à nous interroger [...] sur les conditions de possibilité d’une autorité come cause d’une interruption, d’une méstentente, d’un litige. Explorant la possibilité d’existence d’une autorité qui arrête le fonctionnement de l’ordre social et éducative de domination naturalisé, par moments et de manière intermittente, y compris dans le cadre des institutions; une autorité qui fonctionne en installant le principe d’égalité comme reconfigurant des relations entre des mondes différents, dans le partage du sensible établi...⁵¹⁴

To summarize, if Rancière has stumbled upon a way to imagine a connection between freedom and authority in Jacotot’s method of education, then this authority must be both justifiable and universalizable.

Thus, if we approach Jacotot’s universal teaching through the problematic of freedom and authority not only do we become preoccupied by its particular version of the ‘paradox of education’, we are also pushed to offer an explanation of this paradox. In turn, our efforts to offer this explanation further embroil us in the problems that seem to accompany the problematic of freedom and authority. Thinking through freedom and authority, therefore, pushes us to try to resolve the paradoxical relationship between these terms once and for all. In contrast, if we think through equality and inequality the ‘paradox of education’ appears much less troublesome. In fact, it no longer remains a ‘paradox’ at all. For example, if we look at Jacotot’s universal teaching through a lens of equality then we would note that there is a particular relationship of equality at the heart this teaching practice: the equality of intelligences. The equality of intelligences is both an assumption that founds Jacotot’s practice of universal education and a relationship of equality that this practice aims to demonstrate. Moreover, the demonstration of this

⁵¹³ Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière”, 48.

⁵¹⁴ Greco, *Rancière et Jacotot*, 155-156.

equality is mobilized against a pervasive practice of inequality in education generally that sets up a distinction between those who know and are therefore ‘smart’ and those who are ignorant and are therefore ‘stupid’. The demonstration of the equality of intelligences tries to challenge and displace this particular practice of inequality within education.

However, despite positioning itself against this inequality of the “Explicative Order”, the demonstration of the equality of intelligences is also accompanied by an obvious relationship of inequality—the inequality of ‘mastery’ between teacher and student. Is this inequality useful in its role in encouraging demonstrations of equality of intelligence? Yes: the teacher’s mastery over the student can strengthen the students’ own will that may otherwise be too lazy or distracted without her teacher’s commands. But, is this mastery a *condition* of emancipation, a *condition* for the demonstration of the equality of intelligences? Certainly not: the only *condition* of emancipation is that those involved in universal teaching assume the equality of intelligences.⁵¹⁵ A student may not even need a teacher at all to become emancipated if he already believe in the equality of intelligences. However, even if it is not a *condition* of emancipation, it is clear that in many cases the teacher’s mastery is necessary for students to realize, in both senses of the word, the equality of their intelligences. Given mastery’s important role in emancipation in these situations, is it therefore a *just* form of inequality? Is the inequality of will that exists between teacher and student, parent and child, always excusable? No. The unequal relationship of mastery is simply a relationship of inequality that exists alongside a relationship of the equality of intelligences. It may be a useful relationship of inequality in this practice of universal teaching, but this does not mean that in all circumstances such relationships of inequality are justifiable.

⁵¹⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 18.

To elaborate further, the practice of universal teaching pits a particular demonstration of equality against a particular inequality of the social order: the equality of intelligences against the inequality of intelligences of the Explicative Order. This does not imply, however, that the practice of universal teaching is ‘free’ of all other forms of inequality. In fact, it is clear, that the inequality of wills plays an important role in universal teaching, this relationship of inequality can even enable the demonstration of the equality of intelligences. This does not mean, however, that this relationship of inequality is somehow special, that it has some kind of privileged connection to emancipation. Instead, it simply signals the coexistence or entanglement of relationships of equality and relationships inequality.

In fact, I would argue that this is one of the central benefits of thinking through a problematic of equality and inequality. Put simply, it is easier for us to imagine how people can be equal in some ways and unequal in others, than it is for us to imagine how people can be free in some ways and enslaved in others. Indeed, our intuitive sense about freedom is that we are either free or we are not. In all likelihood, this has something to do with the fact that we tend to understand freedom as a state of being, whereas we tend to understand equality as a relationship. To be sure there are many thinkers who encourage us to think about freedom differently, but, nonetheless, it seems to be more difficult for us to imagine the coexistence of freedom and authority. In contrast, the idea that equality will never be complete, that there will be some relations of inequality alongside all relations of equality, is familiar to us. As Aristotle famously asks us to consider in his *Politics*: “Equals and unequals—yes; but equals and unequals in what?”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 113.

What is useful about thinking through equality and inequality, then, is that it helps us to see that one can polemicize a particular relationship of equality against a particular relationship of inequality exhibited in the social order, without in turn assuming that one is manifesting some pure or full expression of equality. Equality and inequality allow for this complexity in a way that freedom and authority do not. In relation to politics, Rancière notes at a few points in his writings this coexistence and interconnection between equality and inequality. He insists that “[...]a count of equality is always also a count of inequality”.⁵¹⁷ Or again, he writes: “Equality never goes alone. Nor does inequality.”⁵¹⁸ However, Rancière’s energies are clearly directed at highlighting the importance of the polemicization of these terms in politics. As he explains, “it is precisely because things are continuously entangled, because the logic of equality is continuously intertwined with the logic of inequality, that you need criteria to distinguish their principles so as to handle the tangle itself”.⁵¹⁹ So, for Rancière it is important that an opposition between equality and inequality be established in order that he can avoid the kind of collapsing between terms that occurs within Dewey’s thought on education. Indeed, if there is going to be any break with the status quo, then a distance between terms must be created so that the injustices of the ways things are can be distinguished from the expressions for what we would like to exist. Inequalities of the social order must be able to be named and defined against the new manifestation of equality. There must be this opposition in order that the conflict of politics can unfold, in order that a *space* can be created for change to occur. This is what the manifestation of an equality can do: its demonstration can reverberate more widely and call attention to other inequalities of the

⁵¹⁷ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 69.

⁵¹⁸ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 282.

⁵¹⁹ Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière”, 118.

social order. As Rancière writes, it is a manifestation “which grabs hold of the knot that ties equality to inequality. It handles the knot so as to tip the balance, to enforce the presupposition of equality tied up with the presupposition of inequality and increase its power”.⁵²⁰ Or in an earlier description, “it is a way of living out the relation between equality and inequality, of living it and at the same time displacing it in a positive way”.⁵²¹

Although Rancière’s emphasis is on the polemical potential of the opposition of equality and inequality, it is nonetheless clear that he too understands that relationships of equality and inequality coexist. This less glamorous fact of equality and inequality’s coexistence is important to emphasize because it allows us to let go of the idea of a pure practice of politics or a pure practice of emancipatory education. Without this hope for a pure practice, the paradox of education itself poses much less of a problem. In fact, if the inevitable entanglement of equality and inequality is acknowledged, one can avoid some of the problems that follow from trying to resolve the paradox of education. First, for example, one can avoid the tendency to assume a dogmatic position. If one can accept that relationships of equality and inequality will always coexist, then the need to justify the relationships of inequality that appear in any practice of education relaxes. In the case of universal teaching, for instance, unlike Badiou and Greco there is no longer any need to explain and justify the role of the authority of the master’s will. Or, harkening back to Chapter 3, there would be no need for Gutmann, Callan, Wynne, or Giroux to dedicate their intellectual efforts to offering a universal justification for the “democratic”, “Liberal”, “American”, or “emancipatory” authority of their preferred practices of

⁵²⁰ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 282.

⁵²¹ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 48.

education. Indeed, if we think through a problematic of freedom and authority the paradox of education—the apparent need for ‘authority’ in education even when it is meant to ‘free’ us—demands attention. It demands that thinkers defend their preferred practice of education against the charge that it is oppressive in certain ways, to certain people. And, as we have seen, this often leads thinkers to dismiss, downplay or justify the existing oppression in whatever way they can in order that their preferred practice of education may still be seen as desirable. If, however, one thinks through a problematic of equality and inequality, the coexistence of equality and inequality no longer appears as a paradox and therefore there is no need to dismiss, downplay or justify inequality’s presence. The mere presence of inequality does not mean that an educational practice is not emancipatory. Thus, thought through equality, the push towards dogmatism disappears.

In the same way, the tendency to do away with education altogether—which we saw exhibited in the radical individualist trends discussed in Chapter 3—also disappears. In fact, thought through freedom and authority, the paradox of education seems to offer two choices: assume a dogmatic position and justify one’s preferred practice of education in spite of any oppressions it might further, or, try to avoid all instances and signs of oppression, eventually ridding one self of ‘teaching’ altogether. In fact, we saw quite clearly in Chapter 3 how within the radical individualist trend the search for a pure practice, a practice truly ‘free’ from authority, leads people to shy away from *any* relationships, and thus the very possibility of education (or politics). The mere presence of authority, the mere presence of a relationship between two people, suggests that a practice of education is somehow corrupt. And given that ‘authority’ and ‘relationships’ are always present in education in one way or another, education itself comes to be seen

as a suspicious activity. If we think through a problematic of equality and inequality, however, the mere presence of inequality does not pose such a threat. Its existence does not suggest that a practice of education *must* be misguided. If inequality will always be present, we need not become consumed by efforts to rid practices of education of each and every trace until there is nothing left at all but ‘free’ individuals.

Therefore, the fact that we can accept the coexistence of equality and inequality allows the apparent contradiction at the heart of the paradox of education to be partially resolved. More accurately, there is no longer any ‘contradiction’ to be addressed in the first place, since we can see that relationships of equality and inequality exist side by side in a practice of education—something that is hard to imagine if we think through freedom and authority. We need no longer expend our intellectual energy trying to figure out how a practice of education can be both “freeing” and “oppressive”. However, the fact that equality and inequality are inevitably both present in a practice of education does not mean that all tensions between them are resolved. They may coexist peacefully, as it were, but they may also be polemically opposed. The idea that equality and inequality always coexist does not mean that the existence of inequality is justified and should not be critiqued. Nor does it mean that all practices of education advocated for by the likes of Gutmann, Callan, Wynne or Giroux are desirable. Far from it. Rather, part of the tension encapsulated by the paradox of education remains, but it is now expressed in the conflict set up when a specific equality is posed against a specific inequality.

In fact, if we think through a problematic of equality and inequality, the question becomes *what* equality do we want, *what* inequality do we want to fight. We turn away from trying to resolve the general contradiction between freedom and authority, and focus

our attention on the specific form of equality and inequality we want to address. In this way, the shift to a problematic of equality and inequality opens a more pragmatic and positive approach to education. The emphasis shifts from trying to either justify or free ourselves from the presence of an oppressive authority, to trying to argue for and show the existence of a particular equality. Thinking through equality encourages this more humble and contextual approach. As such, it allows the question—“What can we do now?”—to become the focus. It pushes us to consider *what* relationship of equality is important to demonstrate, and in *what* context. And, in so doing, it allows us to avoid the intellectual and practical paralysis of the paradox of education.

Thus, thinking through equality and inequality opens space for the consideration of what kind of emancipatory education is most important: What relationship of equality needs to be made real? What relationship of equality poses a challenge to a particularly embedded and unjust relationship of inequality? What kind of educational practice will be able to create, test, and extend the selected relationship of equality? The shift to equality, therefore, involves a shift towards a consideration of what is possible. Moreover, it also involves a shift in emphasis from ‘the individual’ towards ‘the relationships’ between individuals. Whereas in the problematic of freedom and authority the emphasis is on ‘freeing’ individuals and the possibility of ‘free’ action, if we think through equality and inequality the emphasis is on the *form* of the relationships between individuals: Is the relationship between teacher and student equal or unequal? Or more precisely, what relationships between the teacher and student are equal and what relationships are not? What relationships of equality and inequality exist between students? Between students and other writers or scientists or artists or public figures? How might we manifest a

relationship of equality that is currently invisible or absent? How might we challenge a relationship of inequality that is particularly influential or unfair? If we think through equality, the focus is on creating and perpetuating *relationships* of equality.

In fact, this emphasis on relationships opens up an interesting way to tackle the modern problem of the authority of the teacher. On the one hand, the idea that equality and inequality can coexist allows us to ‘accept’ the authority of the teacher. We know, for instance, that relationships of inequality will inevitably be present, even in emancipatory practices of education. More strongly still, we also know that education-as-police is education’s most common form and is necessary in any society. Therefore, the fact that a teacher is unequal to students because she knows more, or can discipline students, may be important in order that students learn certain things about how to live in their society. However, although this inequality may be quite useful in many educational situations, it is never *just*. It may at any point become a target of an emancipatory educational practice. The existence of certain relationships of inequality can only ever be *conditionally* acceptable.

On the other hand, thinking through equality also opens up a more positive, and less complacent, way of addressing the problem of the authority of the teacher. In fact, with its emphasis on relationships, thinking through equality broadens the problem of the authority of the teacher. In other words, when we think about the relationship between teacher and student we are not only concerned about the inequality that may exist between them, but also the potential equality that the relationship between teacher and student could express. Indeed, thought through the problematic of freedom and authority, the relationship between teacher and student seems inevitably to be a *problem* to be

addressed: how can we limit the teacher's influence? how can the teacher's will not oppress the student? how can the teacher avoid demonstrating her superiority? Thought through equality, however, it is easier for the relationship between teacher and student to be thought positively, as something potentially desirable. One is encouraged to ask, for instance: how might we manifest and extend a relationship of equality between teacher and student?

Rancière, of course, gives us one example of a practice of education that tries to manifest a relationship of equality between teacher and student: Jacotot's practice of universal teaching. What is interesting about Rancière's description of the efforts to manifest a relationship of equality in universal teaching is that it highlights how the practice of education itself continually re-demonstrates this equality. It is the teaching relationship, in other words, which provides a means for creating equality. We can see this most clearly if we examine Rancière's descriptions of "verification"—the pedagogical strategy at the heart of universal teaching. So, on the one hand, verification is simply the pedagogical strategy of the ignorant master. If the teacher does not know any more about a subject than the student, how will he know if the student has come to the right answer or conclusion? He will not, but he can verify that the student has worked and has paid attention: "He will not verify what the student has found; he will verify that the student has searched".⁵²² However, to show that she has searched well, the teacher will also ask basic questions like: How do you know? Show me where it says that? Tell me why you claim this? The student will then point to a sentence in a book, demonstrate what happens in an experiment, draw the teacher's attention to certain facts, etc., and in

⁵²² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 31.

so doing provide a source of “material verification” for the teacher.⁵²³ In part, then, verification is a pedagogical strategy used to determine that a student has worked.

On the other hand, verification is a strategy for demonstrating the equality of intelligences. Indeed, what is being verified is not simply that the student has searched, but also that the student is capable of searching *just like* the teacher. And, in so doing, the equality of the teacher and the students’ intelligences is verified. As Rancière writes, “By compelling his son’s will, the father in a poor family verifies that his son has the same intelligence as he, that he seeks in the same way; and what the son, in turn, looks for in the book is the intelligence of the book’s author, in order to verify that it proceeds in the same way as his own. That reciprocity is the heart of the emancipatory method”.⁵²⁴ The act of verification, then, is also a way of manifesting the equality of intelligences: one searches for this equality and in the course of this search one continually calls attention to all the ways intelligences are the same. In this sense, verification *creates* relationships of equality—the act of verification is the practice which finds and expresses the equality that exists between intelligences.

Interestingly, however, this act of verification is never complete, it is an “endless task”.⁵²⁵ This is in part because learning is never complete; even in a single lesson the student’s explanation of their learning could always be improved and a further verification of its relation to the ‘facts’ could thus be made. However, verification is also never complete because the equality of intelligences can never be verified once and for all. We will never be able to ascertain if intelligences are truly equal, and any

⁵²³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 32.

⁵²⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 39.

⁵²⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 31.

manifestation of equality might be explained away, therefore we must continually reconfirm its presence. To do this, the equality of intelligences must be re-verified in “every human work”⁵²⁶ and in every communication between one person and another.⁵²⁷ In fact, Rancière speaks of it as a “voyage in a circle”.⁵²⁸ In part, this is because of the repetitive nature of verification: you must always show how you arrived at your answer, how your intelligence works in the same way as your neighbour’s or Einstein’s. However, verification is also circular in the sense that it “appears as a tautology”.⁵²⁹ This takes us back to Rancière’s argument, discussed at greater length in Chapter 2, which claims that whatever assumption one begins with—whether equality or inequality—it will be inevitably reproduced in one’s search. So the practice of verification is also a “voyage in a circle” because the initial assumption of the equality of intelligences must continually be re-produced.

Thus, verification is an educational practice that continually reproduces and recreates relationships of equality. At its heart, verification is the continued effort to draw connections, to highlight similarities, to show the sameness between one’s claim and the facts, one’s feelings and words and the feelings and words of another, one’s intelligence and the intelligence of another. In this way, it is an exercise that seeks to manifest equality, but an equality that will never be fully realized. The sameness that verification aims to demonstrate will always require further proof, my translation of the author’s words into my own will always miss some nuance of meaning, our demonstration of equality will always ignore some relationship of inequality between us, etc. Nevertheless,

⁵²⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 41.

⁵²⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 63.

⁵²⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 24.

⁵²⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 15.

the practice of verification demands that we continue to journey outwards towards others and towards the world in the effort to manifest equality. In this way, then, verification is an example of a pedagogical strategy which aims to use the teaching relationship as a means to express equality. As such it gives a powerful example of how the modern problem of the authority of the teacher can be reimagined through a problematic of equality and inequality: the teaching relationship can be seen not simply as a ‘threat’ but as a possibility.

This seems quite promising. To be sure, it does not make the problem of the authority of the teacher disappear, but it does present more tangible ways of thinking about how the teaching relationship can be emancipatory. Indeed, the fact that equality requires a relationship between at least two pushes our thinking towards a consideration of relationships. I would argue that this is another clear advantage to thinking through a problematic of equality and inequality. Given the unavoidability of relationships within education (or politics for that matter), it would seem that a problematic that draws us to consider relationships—both positively and negatively—is superior to a problematic which encourages us to view all relationships with suspicion. Therefore, the problematic of equality and inequality not only allows us to move away from the ‘contradiction’ at the heart of the paradox of education, it also points to how we can mobilize the emancipatory and political potential of what formerly appeared as an insurmountable problem: the teaching relationship.

Finally, the problematic of equality and inequality that emerges in Rancière’s writing also suggests a new way to imagine ‘free-thinking’; the activity that so many consider to be the ultimate aim of education, and the activity that so many associate with

all that is good and just. As we explored in Chapter 2, most often our understanding of this activity of ‘free-thinking’ is shaped by a Platonic heritage that is deeply troublesome, especially for democrats. In fact, it is hard to decouple our understanding of ‘free-thinking’ in education from an understanding of emancipation that sees it as what results from accessing ‘truth’ or some kind of ‘higher understanding’. We are emancipated when we have ‘seen the light’. As we saw, this conception of emancipation is fundamentally hierarchical and antidemocratic. If the ultimate aim of education is associated with this conception of emancipation, then it is no surprise that so many people consider—whether consciously or unconsciously— education and, more fundamentally still, *thinking* to be an aristocratic activity. In turn, if we understand the activities of education and thinking to be aristocratic, this causes trouble for democracy: how can we make sense of education’s role in a democratic society if it is aristocratic? How are we to make sense of the ‘educational’ aspects of democratic politics? Indeed, how are we to have democracy at all, if everyone is not capable of thinking? Indeed, it is clear that understanding ‘free-thinking’ as an aristocratic activity has profound consequences for our approach to education and democracy.

In this context, Rancière’s rethinking of emancipation in particular points to a different way of imagining the activity of ‘free thinking’. As we saw in Chapter 4, Rancière argues that emancipation has nothing to do with the “freeing power of awareness” and instead is simply the freedom experienced in the process of demonstrating an equality.⁵³⁰ When one performs an equality that is not normally recognized in the social order, one can experience the “pleasure of freedom”.⁵³¹ However,

⁵³⁰ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 276.

⁵³¹ Rancière, “Afterword/The Method of Equality”, 276.

the activity at the heart of emancipation is the performance or demonstration of equality. What role, if any, does ‘free thinking’ play in this demonstration? I would argue that what Rancière’s analysis suggests is that ‘free thinking’ plays a crucial role; however, it is no longer conceived as ‘free thinking’ but as intellectual emancipation or, in other words, the demonstration of the equality of intelligences. In fact, as we have seen, a demonstration of the equality of intelligences is implicit in all mobilizations and manifestations of equality, whether in politics or in ‘emancipatory education’. A testing of equal capacity is always present, no matter which relationship of equality is the focus of a practice. So, for instance, if the focus of a practice is the equality of women and men in the workplace, or the equality of different ‘cultures’ in the classroom, the equal intelligence of participants will be implicitly at stake. As Rancière writes, “At the heart of [my] new idea of emancipation is the notion of equality of intelligences as the common prerequisite of both intelligibility and community, as a presupposition which everyone must strive to validate on their own account”.⁵³² I would argue that this implicit exercise of demonstrating the equality of intelligences is simply another way of imagining what others—thinking from within a problematic of freedom and authority—have called ‘free thinking’, ‘critical thinking’ or ‘independent thinking’.

For, what a person experiences in the process of assuming and demonstrating the equality of their intelligence is something very close to what we imagine a person experiences when they think ‘freely’. Returning again to Jacotot’s descriptions of intellectual emancipation, we find that he understands it in extremely similar terms to our general understanding of ‘free thinking’. For an individual, for example, intellectual emancipation is experienced as the process of “becoming conscious of his nature as an

⁵³² Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 51.

intellectual subject”⁵³³, or of “daring to be adventurous”⁵³⁴, or of enjoying the “autonomous exercise of his intelligence”.⁵³⁵ The individual experiences intellectual emancipation, in other words, as *freeing*—with all the personal transformation, exhilaration, and independence this implies. Indeed, according to Jacotot, intellectual emancipation also involves an individual becoming aware of himself as a “seeker of truth”—not someone who possesses knowledge, necessarily, but someone who can evaluate it and search for it.⁵³⁶

However, this personal experience of freedom and the knowledge it may introduce is not a consequence of discovering the truth, but a consequence of actively verifying equality. What ‘frees’ is “not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself”.⁵³⁷ Intellectual emancipation is simply the result of individuals thinking “of themselves as people like everyone else”.⁵³⁸ However, intellectual emancipation requires not only believing in other people’s equal intellectual capacity, but also a relationship with another person’s intelligence—one cannot discover the *shared* power of one’s intelligence in isolation. As Rancière writes: “the only verified intelligence is the one that speaks to a fellow-man capable of verifying the equality of their intelligence”.⁵³⁹ At least two intelligences are required, therefore, for equality to be verified. This means that although intellectual emancipation may often be experienced by an individual as ‘free thinking’, it is a ‘free thinking’ that stems from a *relationship*

⁵³³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 35.

⁵³⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 27.

⁵³⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 30.

⁵³⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 57.

⁵³⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 39.

⁵³⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 41.

⁵³⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 39.

between intelligences. To recognize one's intelligence as equal to another's, one must form a connection, one must try to compare one's own intelligence with the 'works' of another's intelligence. And, in turn, one must present one's own intelligence to another so that it can be seen to be equal. As Rancière argues, intellectual emancipation requires "reciprocity".⁵⁴⁰ Thus, intellectual emancipation creates relationships between intelligences so that their equality can be verified and, in so doing, this proof of equality can trigger feelings of 'freedom' for the individual as they sense the power and potential of their intelligence. It fosters the experience of "participating in the power common to intellectual beings".⁵⁴¹

We can see, therefore, that this idea of intellectual emancipation is a particular way of imagining 'free-thinking', but one which emphasizes its roots in relationships with others. It presents a way of imagining 'free-thinking', in other words, as an exercise of equality. As such, it points to a fundamentally different way to approach the activity which so many believe to be the central task of education. The emphasis shifts from, 'How do we teach people to think 'freely'?' to 'How do we teach people to show and test the equality of intelligences?' Accordingly, we move from a problematic which generally struggles with the aristocratic consequences of 'free thinking' within education to a problematic which suggests that education can and should be a fundamentally egalitarian activity. Indeed, if the central aim of education becomes intellectual emancipation, insofar as different practices of education seek to demonstrate the equality of intelligences in one way or another they are fostering what, for a lack of a better term, one might call a democratic attitude or spirit. As we already noted, democratic education

⁵⁴⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 39.

⁵⁴¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 33.

itself would involve the institution of a political conflict, but education that verifies the equality of intelligences would manifest the relationship of equality that is inevitably also demonstrated in any practice of emancipatory education or democratic politics. In this sense, then, the aim of fostering intellectual emancipation would encourage other forms of emancipation and politics.

Future Directions:

It is now clear how Rancière's shift to a problematic of equality and inequality presents a more democratic frame for thinking about education: it gives us a way to think about what emancipatory or democratic practices of education might look like; it turns our attention to the 'relationships' that make up education and encourages us to analyze them in all their complexity; and, it suggests a way to imagine 'free-thinking' as intellectual emancipation, or, in other words, as a practice that verifies the equality of intelligences. With these moves, it points to a way to think politically about education that is not framed by a problematic of freedom and authority, nor focused on the paradox of education. This seems extremely promising; but how exactly does one begin this exercise of thinking through equality? Or, in other words, how can a problematic of equality and inequality be immediately useful for those interested in thinking politically about education?

First, most basically, I would argue that thinking through equality provides a 'critical line' for evaluating current practices of education politically. In particular, it makes us sensitive to our overreliance on 'freedom' as an ideal in education and the trouble this ideal can cause for our thinking about education. Take for example BC's new

Education Plan, announced in 2011. The premise of this plan is that BC's education system must be reformed to better meet the needs of the 21st century. Key features of this plan are a greater focus on technology, "freedom" and "flexibility" regarding "how, when and where" learning takes place, and most centrally "personalized learning" which means:

student-centred learning that's focused on the needs, strengths and aspirations of each individual young person. Students will play an active role in designing their own education and will be increasingly accountable for their own learning success. It's all about putting students at the centre of education. That means giving teachers and schools the flexibility to make sure each student is well served by their educational program. Each student is unique and our education system will support each student's interests and ways of learning.⁵⁴²

Although there are many political critiques of this plan, most focus on the realities of implementation: How realistic is it given the cash-strapped system? If no money is given to support these initiatives, won't inequality be exacerbated? If students are free to bring their technological devices to class, what about those whose families can't afford iphones or tablets?⁵⁴³ However, at least in theory, the content of the plan—and most particularly the focus of 'personalized learning'—is acceptable to most. As one retired teacher and blogger writes, "there is nothing in this plan which is obviously out of step with current knowledge".⁵⁴⁴ Or, more enthusiastically as Kris Magnusson, Dean of Education at

⁵⁴² *BC Education Plan*, 4-5

⁵⁴³ See, for example, Ana Santos "Considerations for Educational Reform in British Columbia" *Canadian Journal for Educational Administration and Policy*, Issue #138, (2012), 5; Larry Kuehn, "British Columbia Teacher Federation Response to BCs Education Plan: Experiments with kids' learning" <http://www.bctf.ca/publications/NewsMagArticle.aspx?id=24450>; and blogger Megan Jakse, *Alt+Ctrl+???* <http://meganjakse.blogspot.ca/2011/11/my-bc-education-plan-wish-list-2-equal.html>

⁵⁴⁴ *Peter71*, last modified November 25th, 2013, <http://peter71.com/2011/12/05/the-bc-education-plan-first-critique/>.

Simon Fraser University comments, the plan is “visionary” in “our faculty we’ve been exploring and supporting personalized learning for years”.⁵⁴⁵

If, however, we examine BC’s Education Plan through a lens of equality its focus on ‘personalized learning’ becomes open to critical evaluation. First, we might notice that it is part of a strain of political thinking about education that sees ‘the individual’ as primary, and that sees ‘education’ as a rather unfortunate exercise if it is ever anything more than individually driven and focused learning. Given this affiliation with the radical individualist trend, it is not surprising that so many people who consider themselves progressive and critical reformers of education find, to their surprise, that this plan resonates with their views. On the other hand, if we begin from equality, it allows for an evaluation of the BC Education Plan from a perspective that is not already committed in principle to individual learning and freedom. It means that the plans aim of ‘personalized learning’ can be evaluated in theory as well as practice.

Second, thinking through equality creates a different measure for evaluating ‘personalized learning’. We may ask, for instance, what relationship of equality, if any, will be promoted by such a plan? Perhaps, an emphasis on ‘personalized learning’ might be a way for students to demonstrate the equality of their interests with the interests of the official curriculum? If this is the relationship of equality in focus, we must then ask if such an equality is important to demonstrate in the current context? Would a demonstration of such an equality be emancipatory? Would it manifest an equality that is not already ‘seen’ in our context? We can see, then, that thinking through equality presents a line of analysis that demands that we focus on the specific relationships of

⁵⁴⁵Kris Magnusson, last modified November 25th 2013, <http://www.sfu.ca/education/newsevents/foe-news/2011/december/kris-magnusson--dean-of-education--comments-on-bc-s-education-pl.html>.

equality that ‘personalized learning’ might promote. This may allow for a more nuanced political analysis of the aim of ‘personalized learning’, or it may suggest an analysis in line with existing political critiques of the plan, which suggest it will primarily further inequality. Indeed, it is possible to argue that ‘personalized learning’ manifests inequality not equality: what is being demonstrated is that individual students are vastly unequal in their intellectual capacities and thus must have their learning tailored to them. Could it be that what is touted as an ‘emancipatory’ education in fact primarily manifests the unequal capacity of students?

Whichever line of analysis one finds most convincing, it is clear that the problematic of equality and inequality opens up the possibility of a different kind of political evaluation of the BC Education Plan. This is not to say that other political evaluations are not important—in this case, I would argue that the critiques about implementation are essential, as are the critiques which highlight the plan’s neoliberal agenda.⁵⁴⁶ However, such critiques do not trouble the plan’s focus on individual freedom. In contrast, in thinking through equality we can question this focus and ask whether the educational practices involved in ‘personalized learning’ would foster any kind of emancipatory practice or would simply further the current “distribution of the sensible”.

Perhaps, however, the greatest strength of the problematic of equality and inequality is that it helps us to think more ‘positively’ when analyzing current practices of education. In other words, it does not simply provide a line of critique, it can turn our attention to the ‘emancipatory’ aspects of current educational practices that may otherwise be ignored or obscured. One example immediately springs to mind: African-

⁵⁴⁶ Katie Hyslop, “BC Education Plan Linked to Private Corporations”, In *The Tyee* October 5th 2012, last modified December 5th 2013, <http://thetyee.ca/News/2012/10/05/BC-Education-Plan/>.

centred schools in Toronto. In September 2009, after years of organizing and advocacy by some members in the African Canadian community in Toronto, the Toronto District School Board opened a African-centred alternative school. Those in favour of African-centred public schools in Toronto argue that these schools are necessary because the “educational system in Toronto has ‘failed’ and is unable to meet the needs of Black youth today”.⁵⁴⁷ This is demonstrated by the fact that there are high dropout rates and persistent academic underachievement, especially for boys.⁵⁴⁸ Schools are critiqued for fostering racism, and thereby “reproducing inequalities of race”, as well as failing to provide “an educational system that is inclusive and capable of responding to minority concerns”.⁵⁴⁹ Indeed, a key aspect is that “parents [of black youths] and the community do not have much say in the way the children’s educational affairs are structured and administered”.⁵⁵⁰ In addition, it is also argued that, “black students are currently exposed to many negative interpretations of what it means to be Black. Afrocentric education is important for building Black students’ self-esteem through awareness of African culture and contributions, and to develop their sense of responsibility to a larger community”.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁷ Rosina Agyepong, *Black Focused Schools in Toronto: What do African-Canadian Parents Say?*(PhD. diss, University of Toronto, 2010), 1.

⁵⁴⁸ See, for example, Murphy Brown “African-Centred Schools: Not Segregation but Survival” in *Education Action: Toronto*, last modified December 5th, 2013, <http://educationactiontoronto.com/archive/african-centred-schools-not-segregation-but-a-path-to-survival/>; and George J. Sefa Dei and Arlo Kempf, *New Perspectives on African-Centred Education in Canada*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2013.

⁵⁴⁹ George J. Sefa Dei, Josephine Mazzuca, Elizabeth McIsaac, Jasmine Zine, *Reconstructing Dropout: A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students’ Disengagement From School*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 27.

⁵⁵⁰ Agyepong, *Black Focused Schools in Toronto*, 77.

⁵⁵¹The Uhuru Collective, *African Centred Schools: What You Need to Know*, last modified December 5th 2013, http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/George%20Dei/AC%20Pamphlet%20for%20electronic%200.pdf

Unfortunately, however, this last point tends to get lost in the public debate. What has fuelled the largely sceptical public debate, for instance, are concerns that African-centred schools are a new form of segregation, or that they are promoting cultural divisiveness by being ‘black-only’ schools.⁵⁵² In fact, the key political questions—for supporters and detractors alike—seem to be ones around oppression, broadly understood: is this segregation? how should our schools deal with systemic racism? who or what is being excluded in such proposals? what should inclusivity look like? Although these general concerns with oppression are important, they tend to limit consideration of the educational practices that make up African-centred schools. The focus is whether or not having an alternative school for mostly black students will further oppression, not what these schools may or may not be able to achieve.

If, however, we consider African-centred schools through the problematic of equality and inequality as we have outlined alongside Rancière, our attention immediately turns to the question—what practices of equality might an African-centred education actually promote? We then might find that it promotes a demonstration of ‘cultural’ equality, or a demonstration of equal capacity to run, organize and teach a public school, or a demonstration of equal capacity to learn and succeed, etc. Again, as was the case with the BC Education Plan, these particular demonstrations of equality can be evaluated ‘politically’ in light of their importance in the current context. In other words, are they emancipatory? Do they perhaps even stage a public dispute over equality? How is the equality they manifest a challenge to how we normally think of

⁵⁵²George J. Sefa Dei and Arlo Kempf “Debunking myths about African-centred schools” in *Toronto Star*, November 16th 2007, last modified December 5th 2013, http://www.thestar.com/opinion/2007/11/16/debunking_myths_about_africancentred_schools.html; and The Uhuru Collective, *African Centred Schools*.

‘equality’ in schooling? In what ways might the equality they demonstrate be sustained or extended? How might these demonstrations of equality manifest themselves in the classroom? What teaching practices might further these demonstrations of equality, what practices may not? Put simply, consideration of the demonstrations of equality particular to African-centred schools can encourage us to think about what might be made possible through them, not simply who or what might lose out with their creation. It asks us: do African-centred schools foster emancipation, and perhaps even politics?

In fact, for those engaged in these practices of education it provides a measure for evaluating whether their teaching practices are emancipatory, which isn’t simply dogmatic. For instance, rather than claiming one’s teaching is emancipatory because it is ‘anti-racist’ or teaches student about black culture, one can point to how one’s teaching practice encourages students to demonstrate the equality of black culture with the dominant white culture. It is this demonstration of equality that is emancipatory, not the fact that students learned X or Y about racism or black culture. In fact, if a teacher focuses on the demonstration of equality rather than the particular knowledge to be taught, this keeps the teaching practice more open to extension and transformation. It is in this sense that a problematic of equality and inequality can provide a more ‘positive’ lens for thinking politically about education. Its focus on actual practices of education and the equality they might manifest encourages us to examine them and further their potential.

Thus, the problematic of equality and inequality gives us a way to politically analyse practices of education that is quite practical: what relationships of equality does a practice of education seem to manifest? does the demonstration of any of these relationships of equality pose a challenge to the current order? how might these

demonstrations of equality be furthered? Of course, how we answer these questions will be political. Indeed, although the problematic of equality and inequality provides a clear measure for evaluating whether or not a practice of education is emancipatory, this measure itself is unavoidably political. Some people may argue that demonstrating the equality of students' interests or the equality of black culture is an important disruption of our current 'distribution of the sensible', for instance, while others may argue that such demonstrations fit within it. The political nature of this measure, however, merely reminds us of the political nature of emancipation generally. With any demonstration of equality that disturbs the 'distribution of the sensible' there will be disputes over its existence and its importance. This is but one of the ways, after all, that the equality of intelligences is displayed in practices of emancipation and politics.

To conclude, then, it is clear that the problematic of equality and inequality that develops in Rancière's writings suggests a new way to approach problems of politics and education. I have argued that it is a refreshing departure from the problematic of freedom and authority, and the paradox of education in particular, which together have framed so much of our political thinking about education. In contrast, the problematic of equality and inequality positions us to consider 'relationships' in all their complexity, and it suggests a way of imagining 'free thinking' as an exercise of intellectual emancipation. In relation to this last point, this presents the possibility that a politically disruptive practice of the equality of intelligences could become at the heart of many otherwise conventional practices of education. Moreover, the problematic of equality and inequality also provides a clear way of evaluating the emancipatory potential of currently existing, or proposed, practices of education. This is immensely useful, I would argue, for practitioners and

critics alike. Finally, the problematic of equality and inequality asks us to consider the overlap between politics and education—not only whether practices of education are emancipatory or perhaps even democratic, but also the ‘education’ of politics itself. What is it, exactly, that the teaching practices of a particular politics demonstrate? What equality, what inequality?

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