

Liberating Education: What From, What For?

Editors:

Igor Cvejić,
Predrag Krstić,
Nataša Lacković,
Olga Nikolić



Univerzitet u Beogradu
Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju

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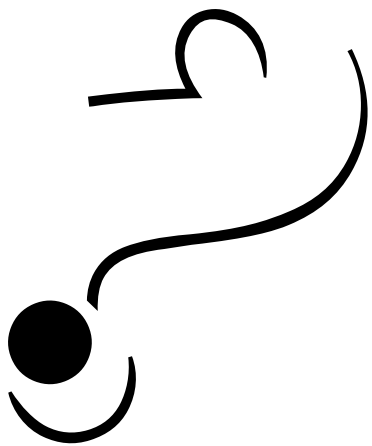


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Emancipatory and Ideological Functions of Education

The paper examines two conflicting societal functions of education: on the one hand, education can work to reproduce the existing power relations, indoctrinate students, and assimilate them into the existing social order, but on the other hand, it can also contribute to the emancipation of students and the society as a whole. By contrasting the emancipatory function with the ideological one, I aim to clarify the meaning of individual and social emancipation drawing on the Enlightenment tradition, locate the main ideological forces opposing emancipation in the field of education today, as well as suggest some ways in which they can be resisted.

First, I will explore the core emancipatory educational ideas of the Enlightenment based on three key texts: Rousseau's *Emile*, Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" and Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Next, I will examine the ideological function of education, in particular of neoliberal education, in order to discern the main ways in which contemporary ideology works through education. Based on insights gained, I will suggest several main lines of resistance, capable of strengthening the emancipatory function of education and countering the ideological one in contemporary neoliberal societies.

1 Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade: olganikolic111@gmail.com; olga.nikolic@institfdt.bg.ac.rs.

In the concluding discussion, I will respond to the critics arguing that the Enlightenment ideal had itself become ideological and had instrumentalized education (Biesta 2008; Osberg & Biesta 2020), which will lead me to make the conceptual distinction between ideology and ideal. It should be noted right from the start that the relations between ideology and emancipation cannot be simplistically reduced to mere opposition. What we call ideology today often used to be emancipatory in the past, and *vice versa*, and many times we could argue that one and the same constellation of educational beliefs and practices is in some ways ideological and in some ways emancipatory at the same time.² Nevertheless, as I will maintain, there is still a clear distinction to be made between ideological and emancipatory functions of education. In order to determine more closely the meaning of emancipatory education, in the following section I will focus on the emancipatory educational ideal of the Enlightenment, as articulated by Rousseau, Kant and Freire. These authors provided some of the most remarkable philosophical visions of emancipatory education.

Emancipatory Ideal of the Enlightenment in Rousseau, Kant and Freire

In the Age of Enlightenment, education was recognized as the way to accomplish the progress of the entire humanity guided by reason, and the word ‘emancipation’ gained new meaning in line with this ideal.³

In Rousseau’s work, the main purpose of education is negative: to keep his student, Emile, away from the corrupting effects of society, in order for him to be able to enter society as a free man.

2 The history of European universities is a good example of this ambivalence, insofar as universities served both as places of critique and the production of new knowledge, as well as of the reproduction of the dominant worldview. For an excellent overview of the early history of universities and the many intertwined social and political interests that shaped it see Rüegg 1992.

3 Its earlier meaning was tied to the Roman law and the legal emancipation of children and wife from *pater familias*. In the XVI century the concept started to be used in the context of religious toleration and by the end of the XIX century it gained traction in the variety of contexts, including liberation from slavery, emancipation of women and the working class.

The main emancipatory message of *Emile* is that children should be raised to be free, which they by nature already are, their freedom being taken away from them in the course of misplaced education delivered in a society of false social values and corrupt institutions.

Rousseau contrasts freedom with dependency and tightly links it to self-sufficiency. He sees original enslavement as coming from human beings becoming too dependent on each other, losing their natural freedom in the process.⁴ Thus Rousseau's main educational aim is to preserve natural freedom as much as possible, enabling Emile to live his life as he freely chooses, for which harmonious and full development of both the physical strength and intellectual and emotional capacities is required.⁵ The fundamental maxim of Rousseau's education is thus: "The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases" (*E*: 84). For this, his Emile needs an autonomous use of reason, free from prejudice, and passions free from vice.⁶

Rousseau stresses the extreme importance of developing children's character to become neither tyrannical nor slavish (*E*: 85). Already in early childhood, children become aware of dominion and submission.⁷ Rousseau advises parents and governors to be attentive to the intention behind children's cries, immediately aiding them if the cause of their cries is a natural need, but ignoring them if they cry in order to

4 "Civil man is born, lives and dies in slavery." Rousseau 1979: 4; see also 233. This work will be cited as *E* for all subsequent references.

5 "Prepare from afar the reign of his freedom, and the use of his forces, by leaving natural habit to his body, by putting him in the condition always to be master of himself and in all things to do his will, as soon as he has one." *E*: 63; cf. 68, 84-85, 119, 184-185. Yet, Rousseau also admits that dependency is the necessary condition of social life that cannot be reversed back to the state of nature. See *E*: 193, 221.

6 "It suffices that, closed in a social whirlpool, he not let himself get carried away by either the passions or the opinions of men, that he sees with his eyes, that he feels with his heart, that no authority govern him beyond that of his own reason." *E*: 255; see also 168, 171, 176, 187, 207, 213-215, 239, 267.

7 "(...) he must give orders or receive them. Thus his first ideas are those of dominion and servitude." *E*: 48. "The first tears of children are prayers. If one is not careful, they soon become orders. Children begin by getting themselves assisted, they end by getting themselves served." *E*: 66.

submit other's will to theirs. On the other hand, children should not be taught to obey commands: whatever they must do, they should recognize as flowing from the natural necessity (*E*: 89-91). It is in this way that children grow up in freedom and learn to treat others as equals.

In *Emile*, Rousseau outlines the road to individual emancipation guided by the natural course of human development. Society is mainly regarded as an obstacle to natural education and consequently to freedom. In fact, Rousseau directly contrasts the education of man for him/herself (natural education) with education for others (for citizenship).⁸ Nevertheless, he occasionally hints at the possibility of reconciliation of individual and social emancipation,⁹ ultimately to be found in the free and complete surrender of individuals to the general will, whose purpose, in turn, is to preserve and protect individual freedom by laws.¹⁰

Before reaching full maturity, *Emile* must travel in order to learn about the various existing governments, as well as about the ideally just social order and the rights that are the basis of its justice, the ones expounded in Rousseau's *Social Contract*. On travel, he will not only test his virtue and fidelity, but also learn about his civic duties, which he is to fulfill with a view of the ideal of society as a free association of men, and the laws appropriate to it (*E*: 459-460). *Emile* becomes a member of society as a free man by resisting its injustices in the name of the ideal of justice, but also by respecting his civic duties. On the one hand, even the actual imperfect governments ought to be respected insofar as they provide security and protect individual rights. On the other hand, their own imperfection enables *Emile* to conceptualize the ideal

8 "(...) one must choose between making a man and a citizen, for one cannot make both at the same time." *E*: 39; see also 40. Rousseau sees Spartan education as the ideal of citizen education.

9 "In the republic, all of the advantages of the natural state would be united with those of the civil state, and freedom which keeps men exempt from vices would be joined to morality which raises him to virtue." *E*: 85; see also 41, 193, 253.

10 "To find a form of association that may defend and protect with the whole force of the community the person and property of every associate, and by means of which each, joining together with all, may nevertheless obey only himself, and remain as free as before. Such is the fundamental problem of which the social contract provides the solution." *E*: 164.

and virtuously strive for it, by sacrificing his individual interest to the common interest. Thus Emile, educated solely for his own freedom, ultimately serves his country as well, by living an exemplary life of virtue (*E*: 473-474).

We see the reverberations of the same main ideas in Kant's insistence that men should neither be slaves of other's will or of outside passions, but subjects that freely submit to their own will. Men, free by nature, are in the state of subjugation when instead of using their own reason, they allow themselves to be guided in their opinions and actions by the self-proclaimed tutors. Individual emancipation for Kant is tied to the emancipation of humanity that can be achieved only gradually, under the condition that free public use of reason is allowed (Kant 2004: 6).¹¹ Everyone should be allowed to freely criticize and take a stand on public matters, especially regarding the issues of state policies and religious postulates. In this way, enlightened individuals, those who have already freed themselves from "self-imposed nonage" will spread the same spirit of freedom and rationality to others. Kant's vision of the progress of humanity should ultimately lead to universal enlightenment. Freedom of thought prepares the ground for civic freedom:

And this free thought gradually reacts back on the modes of thought of the people, and men become more and more capable of acting in freedom. At last free thought acts even on the fundamentals of government and the state finds it agreeable to treat man, who is now more than a machine, in accord with his dignity. (Kant 2004: 10)

Both for Kant and for Rousseau, emancipation has its individual and its social aspect. It is an achievement of an individual striving towards freedom and virtue, but this is truly possible only in a society based on the principles of reason, freedom and equality. Individual emancipation is necessary for the liberation of the entire society and *vice versa*.

11 See also Smajević Roljić 2021 [this volume].

With Paolo Freire, the founder of critical pedagogy, we find preserved these basic ideas of the Enlightenment. The key novelty of Freire's pedagogy is struggle: the society of equality must be fought for; it will not come of itself. Emancipation takes place in the process of this struggle. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he focuses on the role of education in the struggle for emancipation, understood at the same time as the struggle for a more humane society, and against the society of domination in which both the oppressor and the oppressed are dehumanized. Thus, Freire also repeats Rousseau's idea that human beings should overcome the roles of masters and slaves, the oppressors and the oppressed, in order to achieve true freedom. The tendency, overwhelming even today, to understand the process of education as a transmission of content from teachers to students who are expected to merely adopt and reproduce it, is what Freire calls "the banking model of education" in which knowledge becomes petrified, lifeless and isolated from the world. The result is passivisation and dehumanization:

[...] it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire 2000: 72)

The knowledge that students gain in the banking model is meant to make them obedient clerks in the existent system: it insists on inessential contents and doesn't question existent norms. According to Freire's Marxist critique of education, the explanation for this lies in relations of power: dominant social groups adjust social order to their own interests and needs, representing them at the same time as universal and natural. In such an order the oppressed should be taught obedience, they should learn knowledge and skills that have value for the oppressors. Thus, the immediate interest of the privileged in the existing hierarchical order is not to entice free questioning and crit-

ical thinking, especially not among the oppressed. Furthermore, the dominant ideology is so woven into the everyday way of thinking that even well-meaning teachers often unconsciously fall into the patterns of teaching which contribute to the reproduction of the oppression:

Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. (Freire 2000: 78)

The central task of Freire's emancipatory pedagogy is transformative action directed at freedom and equality for the oppressed, and in this way for the entire humanity. Instead of teaching students to adapt to the unjust world, the main task of education should be to entice students to fight for a more just world. Education should liberate students from an ideological consciousness in which the existing social relations are (falsely) represented as necessary and show them that human beings can change and create the world. In giving up that freedom and that potential, man willingly accepts unfreedom, and remains a „well-fed cog in the machine“.

Freire's emancipatory ideal demands also the change of relation between teacher and students, in the direction of more egalitarian, dialogical and problem-posing education, similar to what we find in Socartes:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire 2000: 80)

The three authors certainly have their share of differences, but for the present paper what brings them together matters more. Two main emancipatory messages shared by Rousseau, Kant and Freire, at

the core of the educational ideal of the Enlightenment, are that human beings should become autonomous in using their own reason, and that they should be neither masters nor slaves to each other.

Ideological Function of Education

Ideology is a concept notoriously difficult to define. Descriptive (neutral) concept of ideology and normative (negative or positive) concepts are commonly distinguished (Geuss 1981). In its neutral sense ideology is any web of meanings, beliefs and values shared by a group of people (e.g. a movement, a class, a nation) that enables them to make sense of the social world and shapes their social practices.

In the negative sense, that I use in this paper, ideology is such a web of meanings, but that is in some way illusory, false and distorted under the influence of unequal power relations in society. Thus, ideology is not merely a false representation of social reality, but a web of meanings and corresponding practices serving to maintain and justify domination, i.e. the master and slave relations. Geuss distinguishes three moments in the negative concept of ideology: the falsity of belief, the genesis under the influence of power, and the function of masking, or normalizing and naturalizing unjust and unequal relations of power (Geuss 1981: 12-22). I believe the third moment is the most decisive in attributing an ideological function to a social phenomenon. The ultimate value underlying this critical view of ideology is that human beings are equals, i.e. that their lives and freedom should be equally respected, and that they should treat each other as such. Accordingly, any view that attempts to justify the opposite of this principle should be considered false and ideological. False, because there simply is no good argument to elevate some human lives above others, as a matter of principle, and ideological, because such social systems justify the rule of some human beings over

others on these questionable grounds.¹²

I believe that it is possible to preserve the critical edge of the term “ideology”, by stressing inherent falsities, distortions and misconceptions of the ideological discourse and consciousness, as long as we accept that it is possible to distinguish between systems of beliefs that are more or less rationally and morally justified. Thus, I use the term “ideology” to designate any web of meanings, beliefs and values, along with the corresponding practices, serving to legitimate systematic domination of some over others in a society. The underlying assumption of this approach is that no domination is justified and that it should be replaced by equality, as the only way of securing freedom for all, at least in principle. It follows from delimiting the concept of ideology in this way that our personal evaluatively colored beliefs and opinions are not always necessarily ideological. Our individual perspective may only partly (to a greater or a lesser extent) overlap with one or more ideologies, but we are not inescapably trapped by this or that ideology. Moreover, not all arguments in favour of an established social order are necessarily ideological. Namely, in so far as reasons are given in favour of an existing social order that serves to promote freedom and equality against domination, these are not ideological, but they can become such if they lose touch with reality and become mere phrases. On the other hand, even egalitarian social movements can fall prey to ideological consciousness through a dogmatic, uncritical acceptance of group values.¹³

Nazi Germany gives the clearest example of ideology in its most toxic form. As other aspects of life, education too was here put under

12 Admittedly, moral dilemmas can occur that complicate the application of the principle of equality in some circumstances (e.g. whether to provide urgent medical help to a child or to an elderly patient). However, when it comes to evaluating political systems, there is simply no good argument in favour of the systematic assigning of unequal value to human lives, e.g. through discriminatory laws, especially when the discrimination is based on unchosen characteristics (race, gender, ethnicity, etc).

13 For an overview of the main ideological strategies see Eagleton 1991: 33-62.

strict control in order to ensure that it is in complete service to the state ideology. Students were indoctrinated from the earliest age in line with the completely distorted worldview of the Nazis. Teachers had to attend the Nazi teacher training camps, textbooks and curriculums were modified in line with false doctrines, children's free time was organized around participation in the Nazi youth camps. They were constantly deliberately exposed to the ideology, brainwashed into accepting racial prejudice both via the content that was taught in schools, as well as by the constant pressure to conform and the fear of punishment.¹⁴

In stark contrast to this, contemporary educational institutions readily advocate equality of opportunity for all human beings, the importance of universal education based on scientific worldview and openly call for developing critical thinking, creativity and individuality. This is exactly the reason why it is much more difficult to grasp the ideological effects of contemporary ideology of neoliberalism in the field of present-day education, which are indeed strong but skillfully obfuscated by the emancipatory discourse.

Neoliberalism reveals its ideological character when the values nominally defended by it are compared to the reality of the system that it justifies. Much has been written on the neoliberal capitalist forms of domination and subjection. We can point out overwork and lack of free time, precarious living conditions, lack of social security and health care for the lower social classes, exploitation of the peripheries of global capitalism as sources of cheap labour and spaces for outsourcing polluting industries, as well as the crisis of democracy due to the concentration of power in the hands of corrupt political and social elites, who are simply not held accountable.¹⁵ Neoliberalism has an array of strategies at disposal for representing

14 See Pine 2010.

15 "For Hayek and the neoliberals, the Führer was replaced by the figure of the entrepreneur, the embodiment of the will-to-power for the community, who must be permitted to act without being brought to rational account." Mirowski 2009: 444.

grave social inequalities as in some way justified, reasonable and/or necessary, of opening space for further exploitation and abuse of poor by the rich, and for closing off possibilities for overcoming capitalist modes of production, distribution and exchange.¹⁶

The ideological core of neoliberalism is the generalization of market relations and meanings appropriate to them to other forms of life as described already by Foucault:

First, the generalization of the economic form of the market beyond monetary exchanges functions in American neo-liberalism as a principle of intelligibility and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and individual behavior. This means that analysis in terms of the market economy or, in other words, of supply and demand, can function as a schema which is applicable to non-economic domains. And, thanks to this analytical schema or grid of intelligibility, it will be possible to reveal in non-economic processes, relations, and behavior a number of intelligible relations which otherwise would not have appeared as such— a sort of economic analysis of the non-economic. (Foucault 2008: 243)

As noted also by Mirowski, in neoliberalism the sense of all other aspects of society is determined in relation to the market, and evaluated with respect to how it contributes to the market: citizens are primarily participants in the market and “customers of state services” (Mirowski 2009: 437), freedom is primarily the freedom of the market,¹⁷ the main purpose of the state is to preserve the free market, personality traits and behaviours are held in high regard that enable one to succeed in the market, etc.

16 For a more detailed critique of the basic theoretical assumptions of neoliberalism see Nikolić & Cvejić 2017.

17 “Freedom is not the realization of any political, human, or cultural *telos*, but rather is the positing of autonomous self-governed individuals, all coming naturally equipped with a neoclassical version of rationality and motives of ineffable self-interest, striving to improve their lot in life by engaging in market exchange. Education is consequently a consumer good, not a life-transforming experience.” (Mirowski 2009: 437)

Another contradiction worth noting is that the system that supposedly defends freedom can easily be implemented in the authoritarian governments as well, and is often threatened by democratic processes (Mirowski 2009: 436, 442-446). Also, the system that is supposedly free from being rigged, according to its theoretical defenders, can in fact increasingly be rigged by the rich elites.

What makes neoliberalism an ideology is not simply a collection of its claims, but the justification of these in terms of natural inequality of human beings as a driver of progress. It is this pseudo-evolutionary assumption that establishes the link between the meaning of free market, the nature of human beings, and the values that humanity should strive for that as a constellation of meanings gains ideological character. This justification of free market becomes naturalized and simply assumed in the process of dissemination, becoming increasingly adopted by individuals, materialized and further solidified in repeated practice. Insofar as contemporary schools foster the uncritical acceptance of these ideological suppositions, education too serves the ideological function.

When the above doctrine of the free market is applied to education, this produces a number of interconnected ideological effects, that can be classified into four categories:

1. Economization of education: the main purpose of education is defined through its contribution to economic development, which in its turn is unquestionably envisaged within the existing neoliberal capitalist framework. Responsiveness of education to contemporary needs for skilled labour becomes the crucial part of national and international educational strategies, and businesses become important stakeholders in deciding educational policies. The message to the students is that finding a well-paid job is the main purpose of their education. Although neoliberal educational policies often nominally preserve the old ideal of education for the sake of development of free and autonomous individuals, it is *de facto* re-

placed by a more urgent purpose: providing skills and qualifications for jobs and further education (that also ultimately leads to jobs). As freedom is ideologically reduced to market freedom, the autonomous subject of the Enlightenment is replaced by the figure of “an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur” (Olssen 1996: 340).

2. Marketization of education: education is seen as a market good, or rather a service provided by educational institutions to parents and students as customers and users. This is especially the case with private schools, but public educational systems adopt elements of this as well (Biesta 2004). Setting the relations of main agents in education in this way leads to a number of practices aimed at attracting customers, adapting education to their needs, and adopting management, evaluation and standardization practices taken over from business environments. All this amounts to the further corporatization of education.

3. Corporatization of education: inner organization of schools according to the model of corporate management, including constant measuring, bureaucratization, and other practices aimed at efficiency, accountability and attracting finances. These become the main determinants of what and how is to be learned, leading to the stifling of freedom and spontaneity in teaching and learning. Apple and Biesta show how these managerial practices serve more as a mechanism of “governing by numbers” than they actually improve teaching and learning processes (Apple 2004: 99-115; Biesta 2004).

4. Neoliberal subjectivities: participation of students in this kind of schooling has a number of effects on the formation of their subjectivity. Foucault was the first to note that in the process in which neoliberal forms of governmentality interpret us as human capital, a new form of self-relation emerges: we are urged to become “entrepreneurs of the self” (Foucault 2008). Imperatives of individual responsibility are enforced throughout the entire edu-

cational process. Students are forced to compete in the standardized tests, ranked according to test results on which their options for further education and employment depend. Permanent learning is encouraged because the market needs a workforce capable of constant adaptation, and creativity is desirable insofar as it can be channeled towards technological and product innovations.¹⁸ General effects of neoliberal ideology on education are such that students are drilled to fit into the existing system of inequality, filtered according to how well they fit their predetermined roles, based on the pre-given and unquestionable standards aligned with economic interests and imposed with an air of scientific objectivity. (Apple 2004) In schools driven by fulfilling the tasks set forth by management, student's educational experiences are impoverished, and there is neither time nor purpose to be found in questioning and imagining alternatives to the existing system.

In a totalizing ideological move, the original assumption that the value of education is to be measured against its contribution to the economy leads to the adoption of further standards that distinguish what is to be learned from what is not, increasingly reducing education to training for future employment and shaping personalities capable of navigating the neoliberal labour market, which ultimately amounts to perpetuating inequalities and injustices that underlie contemporary capitalism.

In other words, oppression in education does not merely function to preserve privilege; education as it in fact exists oppresses students because its central sense and purpose is domination and subjection—the subjection of bodies and minds to the tyranny of the actual.”
(De Lissovoy 2015: 77)

However, we should also note that contemporary neoliberal ed-

18 For a detailed analysis of contemporary “governmentalization of learning” see Simons & Masschelein 2008. For an analysis of most of the above-mentioned neoliberal effects on education through the concrete example of OECD's rhetoric on PISA see D'Agnese 2021.

education has many diverse effects that counteract the general trend of economization. School often still is the space for free exploration, discovering and experimenting, although this has been mostly left to the initiative of individual teachers who care about motivating students for something more than passing the test. Possibilities for escaping the ideological effects of education are many. I will point out several emancipatory tendencies that could create potential lines of resistance to the contemporary dominant ideology, that draw inspiration from the educational ideal of the Enlightenment. Clearly, questioning, problematizing, autonomous and critical thinking still turn out to be the main barriers to the effects of ideology, both in terms of individual emancipation and in terms of opening possibilities for changing existing relations of power in society.

Critical thinking can be understood in two main senses: logical and socio-critical. Logical sense involves educating thinking to be guided by reasons, to autonomously assess evidence, to be able to formulate valid and recognize invalid arguments. Socio-critical sense involves disclosing unreflected social prejudices that are considered as self-evident, social injustices and relations of power that are represented as necessary and unchangeable. Enhancing critical thinking in both of these senses is the first emancipatory trend which can empower students to use their own reason. In addition, as pointed out by Freire, critical thinking must go hand in hand with the development of the capacity for action. This trend is opposed to the contemporary apoliticalness of education: even when politics is an explicit topic in class, political action, possible role and responsibility of students in recreating and changing the social world, are usually not in the focus. To encourage students to change the world and to warn them against possible ideological and demagogical manipulations in the political sphere, to enable them to defend their own and common political interests and rights if these are under attack, is in today's context one possible line of defense of freedom. Students should be aware that they are also political subjects that have the right to demand and organize for social

change. Emancipatory education today would be the one that shows students how they can get involved in the transformation of the world together with others in the spirit of freedom and equality.

Another important dimension of this is the nurturing of equality and solidarity among students and between students and teachers, as a way of resisting the trend of competitiveness and hierarchization. Education should not give up on the important ethical message of the Enlightenment that people should be neither masters nor slaves to each other.

Finally, empowering students to think critically in the neoliberal world means encouraging them to have interests beyond technical skills needed for profession, which would certainly make them useful, but not necessarily autonomous members of society. Engaging in non-useful subjects, such as arts and humanities, is another way to emancipate oneself from the dictatorship of the market. That doesn't mean that education should completely neglect professional skills, but it does mean not giving up on another, more significant goal of education: not to produce good workers for the capitalist market, but to teach people how to be free: how to think, form values and act autonomously, with others as equal, free human beings.

Implications and Conclusion: The Difference Between Ideal and Ideology

The critical question that we should ask ourselves in conclusion is: are we merely creating a new ideology while insisting on education for freedom and equality? Is every attempt to normatively define what education should be necessarily a seed of a new ideology, instrumentalizing education and limiting free possibilities of educational becoming, especially the one drawing inspiration from the Enlightenment?

According to Biesta, Kant's assumption „of a fundamental differ-

ence between immature and mature beings“ (Biesta 2008: 170), coupled with the Marxist critique of ideology, ultimately leads to the conclusion that those who are not yet emancipated need emancipators to show them how to free themselves. They cannot do it themselves due to their condition of immaturity, being trapped by their own ideological consciousness. Thus, the inner logic of the Enlightenment presupposes an unequal relation of power between the emancipators and those who should become emancipated. (Biesta 2008: 170-172)

In another important critique, Osberg and Biesta add that the Enlightenment ideal of attaining universally valid knowledge necessarily creates inequality between those rational subjects who possess this knowledge, and students who are to be molded in accordance with the insights of the enlightened teachers, amounting to the instrumentalization of education, i.e. submitting aims of education to interests that are external to it:

[...] early forms of liberal education can be understood as the perpetuation of ideal forms of knowledge (e.g. universal truth), selfhood (e.g. rational autonomy) and culture (e.g. liberal political order) through well intentioned manipulations of the student’s psyche by the teacher or curriculum (which presents and/ or represents the ideal knowledge that must be acquired) to achieve the desired psycho-social and/ or socio-political end (liberal rationalism/humanism). (Osberg & Biesta 2020: 9)

However, history has shown that the attainment of universal knowledge on which all rational subjects could agree and build a society around is impossible, especially when applied to the world of values. Rather than to equality, the Enlightenment contributed to the hegemony of the Europocentric/Western worldview as the only valid and rational one, thus ending up as one more ideology among others.

I don’t agree with the claim that the distinction between maturity and immaturity leads to an insurmountable inequality between

those who are mature and those who are not and to the inevitable conclusion that the immature ones cannot overcome this state on their own (Biesta 2008). Rousseau's *Emile* is indeed in need of a teacher, but Kant allows that there are those who can overcome the state of immaturity on their own (although they are few)¹⁹, and Freire stresses equality between teachers and students. Thus, the Enlightenment ideal may be articulated in ways that allow for the possibility of transcending the state of immaturity and ideological consciousness by one's own powers, or together with equals. However, we should admit that in so far as the enlightened ones are understood as being in possession of the ultimate truth, this does stray towards ideology. This claim should therefore be criticized: we are all in the position of constantly overcoming our immaturities and ideological presuppositions, nobody is completely immune. We should always be wary that we might be mistaken, that we can learn from others, changing our perspective in the process.²⁰

Secondly, although history has shown that ideas of the Enlightenment can be abused, as all ideas can, going back to the original texts shows that the moment of equality as the core of this ideal is continually stressed, which I believe can still be a source of inspiration for articulating educational practices opposed to the contemporary world of domination.

Thus, I also believe that by proposing equality and freedom as the ideal to be strived for, we do not necessarily end up in another ideology. But here it all depends on the distinction between ideology and ideal. In conclusion, I will propose a distinction between ideology and social ideal that I believe to be in line with

19 "Dogmas and formulas, these mechanical tools designed for reasonable use--or rather abuse--of his natural gifts, are the fetters of an everlasting nonage. The man who casts them off would make an uncertain leap over the narrowest ditch, because he is not used to such free movement. That is why there are only a few men who walk firmly, and who have emerged from nonage by cultivating their own minds." Kant 2004: 5-6.

20 On the concept of perspective see Nikolić & Cvejić 2020.

Biesta's and Osberg's emergentist proposal (Osberg and Biesta 2020).²¹

I suggest that we should take note of the fact that historically, what started as an ideal often became an ideology: unreflected, enforced, serving to justify the existing social order, rather than to question it and possibly change it. Nevertheless, ideals keep their potential to become yet again reflected on, enlivened, given a renewed emancipatory meaning.

What distinguishes social ideal and ideology is their content, their form and their function in society.

With respect to the content, social ideals have general well-being in mind. This clearly distinguishes ideals from ideologies as being tied to particular interests of a class, nation, race, or another type of group in establishing its dominance over another group.²²

Regarding the social function, unlike ideology, ideals serve precisely not to preserve the existing order, rather, they are strivings towards a different future.

Finally, regarding the form, there is an openness and a possibility of questioning, inherent to ideals, which ideologies lack. An ideal should not be understood as a goal unquestionably set in advance, but as a vision motivating us to strive towards realizing it in a process of constant questioning of ways in which it should or could be truly realized.

21 Biesta and Osberg suggest that we should "understand education as an emergent entity that does not simply serve a purpose, but also brings with it the purpose it serves. (...) education has its own unique aesthetic qualities, like art or music, which have the power to elicit emotion and are thus affective (...)." Osberg & Biesta 2020: 2. See also: Osberg & Biesta 2020: 3-5, 7-8.

22 This is also why neoliberalism has never been an ideal. Although the economists of the Austrian School and the thought collective gathered around the Mont Pèlerin Society, aimed to perfect the entire humanity, and probably believed that they are making the world a better place, their theoretical presuppositions dogmatically cemented and justified the distinction between elite and masses, defending inequality as a natural state of humanity. Thus, their endeavours were ideological from the very beginning.

Ideals involve a different kind of meaning-giving than ideologies: an ideal is a vision towards which one may strive, actively trying to explore, construct and rethink it in the process of moving towards its fulfillment, without turning it into a dogma. Only in so far as we approach it in this way does it remain a living ideal.

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