

## **Social consciousness, education and transformative activity**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines two aspects of social consciousness: consciousness in the sense of knowledge of the objective reality and consciousness in the sense of awareness of oneself as a subject in his/her social ties with other persons-subjects. In the light of such an approach to consciousness in this essay we discuss the importance of education and the role of educators in the formation of people's ability to shape and transform social reality.*

**Key words:** *Consciousness, Empiricism, Knowledge, Learning interest, Social emancipation, Subjectivity, Teaching*

### **Introduction**

In times of deep crisis, when dominant social relations no longer respond to the needs of the majority of people and a radical social transformation becomes necessary, it is of great importance to exam the active role of consciousness in social change, (of consciousness, on the one hand in the sense of understanding the contradictions of the present and, at the same time, identifying the possibilities of transcending them, and, on the other hand, as an integrated form of connection-communication that will impact on people aiming at collective, coordinated activity).

Social consciousness and social action are decidedly associated with education, since it is therein that both specific cognitive abilities and attitudes to social reality are largely developed. By being a crucial field in shaping consciousness and life stance, education, as a specific social institution, certainly does not lie outside social relations but is essentially determined by them,

embodying, at the same time, their underlying contradictions and conflicts. Hence, education either functions as a means of ensuring the adaptation of younger generations to the dominant social system or “becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Shaul, 2005, 34).

Given that education acquires genuine social significance to the extent that it renders people capable not only of adapting to, but also of transforming the world, a study of education within the framework of human transformative activity, i.e., from the perspective of education’s potential contribution to the cause of social change and emancipation, would require an examination of the cognitive preconditions of such a change, in conjunction with examining the cognitive dimensions of emancipatory educational activity.

In line with the above considerations, we shall attempt to highlight some crucial issues regarding the relationship between social consciousness and transformative activity, and also between education and the formation of a social consciousness which advances such activity.

## **Consciousness as knowledge**

Generally speaking, human consciousness is linked to people’s active stance vis-à-vis the world; it stems from labour activity of which it constitutes an organic part. Consciousness does not simply involve a reflection of reality but also a psychic constitution of the plans/goals of social labour. It is the internal, ideal form of the transformative labour relation to the world which this form guides and directs.

If we examine the relation between social consciousness and labour we will observe that, as regards the productive interaction of people with nature, consciousness constitutes

knowledge of the objective reality. People should be aware of reality, especially of the real attributes of the objects of labour, of the characteristics of production conditions, and of the means of production (the production forces in general) used in order to produce the desired outcome. Knowledge of things, in the sense of identifying their objective attributes, is an essential requirement in order to understand how susceptible they are to change through the intentional transformative effect of humans upon them.

Knowledge is related to the establishment of the goals of labour. Knowledge, as a reflection of reality, is the foundation for providing the psychic form of the desired final outcome of the productive activity, which directs the movement towards this outcome. From this perspective, consciousness is an anticipation of the result of transformative human activity. In addition to that, practical-labour activity is the field in which acquired knowledge (its accuracy and validity) is not only tested but also broadened, while new attributes of objective reality are also revealed. Thus, we acquire knowledge about the world in order to transform it and precisely because we transform it.

However, which knowledge is the one that allows people to comprehend the relations and processes characterizing various objects in the world and therefore effectively act on them and transform them?

The initial, direct reflection of things is realised through our senses, since the latter reflect the former as the sum of their directly observable external attributes. Sensuous knowledge is accumulated in numerous daily situations which constitute people's everyday experience. Empirical knowledge, stemming from the spontaneous, immediate practical interaction with the surrounding reality, grasps and contains the phenomenality of things. On this cognitive level, things appear familiar: we know

that something exists; however we do not really know what it is.

The entrapment of knowledge in the empirical phenomenality of things makes it impossible to comprehend the interconnections that make up the wholeness of their parts. Empirical knowledge, in general, cannot distinguish universal ties, causal relations, contradictions and developmental processes. Being restricted to the limits of the phenomenal, it always perceives the particular, which, when examined outside the framework of its interconnections, emerges as a fact, static and unchanged. Empirical knowledge does not simply focus on the particular, but on a particular with no history.

The superficial and fragmented nature of empirical knowledge is the starting point for the creation of a false or, more precisely, inverted reflection of things, when random and inessential attributes of their occasional daily connections are viewed as being substantial and definitive. A large part of the bias, illusions and fetishisations that affect social consciousness and social practice stems from people being entrapped (under specific social relations) in their immediate, sensuous - empirical knowledge of reality.

It should be noted here that for thousands of years, mankind has been moving forward by taking advantage of its empirical knowledge of the world. This knowledge has been the result of people's everyday interaction with things and the accumulation of information associated with their directly perceivable parts and properties, to the extent that repeated labour activity confirms their practical significance (through a number of trial-and-error actions) and the validity of people's perceptions of them. The accumulation, codification and processing of everyday experience has definitely improved our productive interaction with nature. However, within the framework of empirical knowledge, people can only have a superficial understanding of various objects and phenomena and subsequently act on them in a very restricted, superficial manner.

At the times when empirical knowledge prevailed, no particular, specialised action was required for it to be conveyed from generation to generation. Education took on the form of an apprenticeship, with the direct participation of children in the production-related and other activities of adults, through observation and imitation of these activities. This apprenticeship was supplemented with the transfer of accumulated experience through verbal folklore (sayings, tales, songs, rituals). As a rule, the societies that preceded industrial capitalism primarily consisted of illiterate people.

The emergence and development of the capitalist mode of production, particularly since the Industrial Revolution, radically changed the significance and role of knowledge in society as a whole, and set the stage for a gradual transformation of science into a productive force. Similarly, the mechanization of production would create the need for mass education of the workforce. Schools, as a mass institution requested by society, is a phenomenon of industrial capitalism, given the need to continuously convert increasingly in-depth scientific knowledge into working skills.

During the last four to five decades, the mechanization of production processes, driven by the capitalists' pursuit of relative surplus-value, has gradually evolved into the automation of the means of labour (a tendency associated with the scientific-technological revolution and technoscience) through the transformation of knowledge-creation processes into an organic part of the development of technology and the production of use-values.

In view of the dynamic acceleration of scientific research, the rapid increase and consolidation of scientific knowledge and their almost direct application in technology and production, and due to the significant expansion of the intellectual content of labour, what becomes essential is systematic scientific education as a decisive process for the formation of the most

crucial part of contemporary labour-power. And this concerns not only contemporary capitalist society (as a significant, though hardly dominant, trend) but any kind of future society (a possible post-capitalist society) that may emerge on the basis of highly industrialized or automated means of production.

Thus, given the aforementioned trends in the productive interaction between people and nature, the understanding of human reality and the objective possibilities of its transformation towards social progress necessarily requires the transcendence of everyday experience through systematic-theoretical investigation of this reality. Therefore, education, as a field of teaching activity which can serve the cause of social progress by enabling people to understand and change their world, is definitely associated with developing the ability to systematically-theoretically conceive reality.

## **The inadequacy of educational empiricism**

In this context, it should be pointed out that the effort to promote schools as a place of teaching theoretical knowledge comes in contrast with those traditions in pedagogical theory which view the sensuous perception of the world, along with the spontaneous accumulation of empirical knowledge by children, as being of absolute value.

An emblematic representative of this tradition is undoubtedly Rousseau. His negative attitude towards culture and the progress of science, and his desire to reshape society through a peculiar discovery-preservation of human childlikeness, led him to view the education of youth in the light of pedagogical naturalism and educational empiricism.

In idealizing sensuous-empirical knowledge, Rousseau downplayed the importance of children's mental development

as it results from the organized and systematic transmission of theoretical knowledge:

Since the more men know, the more they are deceived, the only means of avoiding error is ignorance. Do not judge, and you will never be mistaken. That is the lesson of nature as well as of reason. Beyond the immediate relations – very small in number and very easily sensed – which things have to us, we naturally have only a profound indifference toward all the rest. (Rousseau, 1979, 204)

However, regarding human life within culture as inevitable, Rousseau proposed a form of free education, suitable for the ages up to twelve years, whereby the senses and the mind of the child are exercised through the spontaneous observation of and contact with things. It is a form of negative education on which Rousseau advises teachers: “Do not give your pupil any kind of verbal lessons; he ought to receive them only from experience” (Rousseau, 1979, 92).

Rousseau’s aim is the unimpeded development of children’s ability to think and acquire knowledge autonomously, thus becoming impervious to the intellectual manipulation that society can exercise over them. Referring to Emile, the ideal student of the homonymous work, he states: “Forced to learn by himself, he uses his reason and not another’s; for to give nothing to opinion, one must give nothing to authority, and most of our errors come to us far less from ourselves than from others” (Rousseau, 1979, 207).

In this excerpt, one is quick to recognize the spirit of the traditional liberal approach to education which, in denouncing all forms of dogmatism and intellectual manipulation ever since the Age of Enlightenment, has advanced autonomous thinking as the only form of thinking that can lead to emancipation. It was not by accident that Kant saw in the ideal of autonomous thinking the fundamental liberating principle of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. “Sapere aude! Have courage to make

use of your own understanding! Is thus the motto of enlightenment” (Kant, 1996, 17).

Rousseau limits the provision of organized teaching to enable the unfettered development of the child’s natural inclinations and autonomous discovery of the world. At the same time, the child’s autonomy vis-à-vis the education process, but also as reflected in his/her overall attitude towards society, assumes in Rousseau’s thought the form of a pronounced individualism. In his description of the student who is to emerge from the alternative education system he sets forth, he characteristically notes:

He considers himself without regard to others and finds it good that others do not think of him. He demands nothing of anyone and believes he owes nothing to anyone. He is alone in human society; he counts on himself alone. More than anyone else, he has the right to count on himself, for he is all that one can be at his age. (Rousseau, 1979, 208)

Along a similar line of thought, other education theorists have also idealized educational empiricism, a representative example being that of Maria Montessori. As she claims:

We discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher’s task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child. (Montessori, 1995, 8)

Ivan Illich, categorically rejecting schooling and teaching and idealizing the spontaneous acquisition of empirical knowledge, argues that

The same people, paradoxically, when pressed to specify how they acquired what they know and value, will readily admit that they

learned it more often outside than inside school. Their knowledge of facts, their understanding of life and work came to them from friendship or love, while viewing TV, or while reading, from examples of peers or the challenge of a street encounter. Or they may have learned what they know through the apprenticeship ritual for admission to a street gang or the initiation to a hospital, newspaper city room, plumber's shop, or insurance office. (Illich, 1973, 75)

Taking the same stance, Carl Rogers states: "Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience" (Rogers, 1961, 23-24). As he goes on to assert, "the only learning which significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning. Such self-discovered learning, truth that has been personally appropriated and assimilated in experience, cannot be directly communicated to another" (Rogers, 1961, 276). He thus concludes by dismissing the necessity of teaching: "As a consequence of the above, I realize that I have lost interest in being a teacher...I have come to feel that the outcomes of teaching are either unimportant or hurtful" (Rogers, 1961, 276).

As can be seen from the above excerpts, the supporters of pedagogical naturalism and educational empiricism share a child/person-centered approach to learning, and are skeptical towards the role of society, adults and teachers in the development of an individual's personality, through intentionally organized teaching/ learning and the cultivation of intellectual skills.

In their view, the development of the child is a spontaneous, almost natural, process on which the organized, systematic teaching-education can have negligible or even negative effects. The formation of the individual is viewed as a self-discovery of already existing abilities and attributes, which negates the importance of examining the interaction between the child, the particular social environment, and the equally

particular character of education, as a crucial relationship that defines the very emergence and cultivation of personality traits in each individual.

From this point of view, educational empiricism (just like empiricism in general) is inextricably linked to individualism, in a relation that could not be expressed more clearly than in the following statement by Kenneth Strike:

Thus, the empiricist knower is a lonely and empty self. Beginning with its own experiences and capacity for reasoning, it must construct a world. The concepts of others do not help one to see and are threats to one's intellectual autonomy. Knowledge acquisition is a private matter. Meaningful learning is a task for do-it-yourself ... At their roots, the self of liberalism and the self of empiricism are the same self. Both start with an epistemologically isolated self, a self that has the obligation to construct a world relying on its own resources. (Strike, 1989, 67)

Educational empiricism refers to an individualistic consideration of humans, accompanied by suspicion towards anything of a social nature, towards the collective activities of people and their cultural-cognitive achievements. In this context, it should be underlined that the idealization of individual experience, i.e., of the accumulated individual sensuous knowledge, goes against human sociality, undermining the foundations of human communication.<sup>i</sup>

Based on the above, we can conclude that the viewpoint of educational empiricism is mainly that of the isolated, alienated individual of the bourgeois society. Here we are dealing with a classic expression of the individualism of the bourgeois worldview, which is inherently unable to understand the social determinants of human existence, the predominantly social nature of knowledge and mind/consciousness.

In a scathing statement, Max Horkheimer remarks:

Bourgeois thought is so constituted that in reflection on the subject which exercises such thought a logical necessity forces it to recognize an ego which imagines itself to be autonomous. Bourgeois thought is essentially abstract, and its principle is an individuality which inflatedly believes itself to be the ground of the world or even to be the world without qualification, an individually separated off from events. (Horkheimer, 1982, 210)

But in contrast to this illusory perception, human knowledge, in conjunction with the intellectual activity that leads to its acquisition, is directly linked to human sociality and communication. One requirement for people to be able to communicate universally, not only at a given point in time, but also across time, is for the content of their individual consciousness to be presented in a general form. Hegel points out that “thinking means the bringing of something into the form of universality” (Hegel, 1995, 95). By lifting up individual sensuous experience to the level of generality, transforming it into concepts and systems of concepts, the language-related mental activity imparts a universally perceived and announceable form to individual experience, thereby ensuring human communication: “The higher forms of mental social interaction that are such an important characteristic of man are possible only because – by thinking – man reflects reality in a generalized way” (Vygotsky, 1987, 48-49).

Considering, in the light of the above, the idea of autonomous thought, it is worth taking into account the following statement by Hegel:

‘Think for yourself’ is a phrase which people often use as if it had some special significance. The fact is, no man can think for another, any more than can eat or drink for him and the expression is a pleonasm. (Hegel, 1975, 36).

Thus, all persons think autonomously in all cases. They do not think, however, neither could they, as lonely individuals isolated from other people. Every person is able to know the world through his/her own mental activity, but always within a framework of social relations. And of course, the fact that people think autonomously does not necessarily mean that their thoughts are rid of all bias, illusions and fetishisations. The educational theories according to which the basic cause of intellectual manipulation lies mainly in socially organized education and learning-connected to systematic teaching ignore that it is the spontaneous, everyday thinking, entrapped as it is in experience and therefore unprocessed, which perceives the world in a false, inverted way and such a view of the world inevitably leads to its passive acceptance.

## **Empirical consciousness and working-class conscientization**

From the perspective of the social-practical consequences of people been entrapped in everyday empirical consciousness, the well-known research of Paul Willis has been particularly enlightening on the ideas of a group of working-class high-school students in a British industrial town, which constitute the so-called "counter-school culture". This kind of culture seems, at first glance, to be a form of working-class students resistance to the official school system, its values and ideology. But what Willis' research actually reveals is that this kind of resistance is no resistance at all, but quite the opposite. By rejecting theoretical activity and idealising practical knowledge, everyday experience and manual labour instead, the representatives of "counter-school culture" just accept their highly disadvantaged position in the social division of labour in an unreflective, conformist way. The case of "counter-school culture" is a very characteristic example of an inverted consciousness which, being entrapped in an immediate empirical understanding of reality, interprets the major traits of a miserable social condition as a virtue.<sup>ii</sup>

The case of “counter-school culture” studied by Paul Willis confirms the view, grounded in Marxist theory, that the spontaneous empirical consciousness of workers within a bourgeois society is, to a significant degree, a bourgeois consciousness, in the sense that it reflects bourgeois relations in society in a way that confirms the dominance of the bourgeoisie. It is first within this immediate empirical perception of reality that the dominant material relations, “the relations which make the one class the ruling one”, are expressed as a sum of “ruling ideas”, i.e., as “ideas of its dominance” (Marx and Engels, 1998, 67). It should be stressed that the formation of the ruling ideas on the basis of the immediate empirical perception of reality is related to a social consciousness which, being predominantly non-reflective, perceives the social relations as given, natural and inevitable. In this case, the ruling ideas are produced by all members of society, insofar as the latter cannot rise above the level of the everyday, empirical perception of social reality.

In *Capital*, Marx once again refers to the spontaneously formed social consciousness, when he examines the phenomenon of the fetishism of the commodity presenting it as a classic case of false consciousness, which, is not imposed upon but arises in the minds of all members of the bourgeois society, when they cannot perceive the universally dominant commodity economy beyond the boundaries of its phenomenality (Marx, 1977, 163-177). In the fetishistic perception of the commodity/capitalist economy, things appear to be exchangeable because of their material-physical properties, like gold, this universal commodity par excellence, which appears to be exceptionally valuable and aesthetically pleasing because of its physical characteristics rather than its historical-social properties, associated with its particular role as a general equivalent of value. The fetishism of the commodity constitutes a classic case of a spontaneously generated inverted perception of commodity-money relations, whereby these relations are seen as natural and, therefore, inevitable.

Following this line of analysis, Lenin will support that workers spontaneously can develop only a trade-union consciousness, which does not exceed the horizon of their individual claims within the framework of the bourgeois society, and signifies “the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie” (Lenin, 1978, 41). Max Horkheimer refers to the same limits of workers’ everyday consciousness when he states that “Even to the proletariat the world superficially seems quite different than it really is” (Horkheimer, 1982, 214).

We need, at this point, to call attention to the fact that the everyday empirical consciousness of the workers, as shaped under conditions of class exploitation and spontaneous, daily resistance against it, forms a working-class culture which is quite different from that of the ruling classes.

This culture can contain ideas that question the dominant social relations, values and ideologies. That is why this everyday working-class culture, together with its more elaborated expressions in the form of critical-progressive-socialist art, literature, social science and philosophy, is by large marginalized within the system of formal education in capitalist societies.

It is necessary to point out here that this everyday working-class consciousness and culture is certainly the starting point for moving to a higher level of understanding by the wage laborers of their social position and class interests. The deeper, critical examination of capitalist society would be impossible if its exploitative character was not perceived at the level of everyday empirical perception. What is more, no ideological reference to the necessity of the political contestation of capitalism can affect the workers unless they have en masse experienced major difficulties in meeting their basic needs within the dominant social relations at the level of their daily lives, and, subsequently, roughly grasped the contradiction between their own interests and those of their employers.

However, the empirical perception of social contradictions is not by itself enough to account for either their causes or the prospects of overcoming them. A particular cultivation-education of the workers' consciousness is required so that they can claim their emancipation, and from a "class in itself" to become a "class for itself". This should be the aim of the ideological activity of a revolutionary workers' party that Lenin emphatically promoted.

## **Knowledge and the necessity of teaching**

If thought is autonomous by definition, and concerns a whole set of mental activities autonomously realized in a person's brain, then what should be required for social emancipation is to determine the kind of thought, and the level of development of one's intellect/consciousness that allows for a deeper understanding of reality and the adoption of an active stance towards it.

Knowledge always begins with the senses and the daily, experiential contact with things. Yet, the development of knowledge is related to overcoming experience, which involves mentally processing rather than disregarding it, and deeply understanding its content. The understanding of an object which constitutes a developing organic totality of parts is definitely associated with the analytical processing of the initial sensuous perception of the object in the first place, and, subsequently, with the cognitive identification and conceptual representation of its parts.

However, when the initially analytical activity of the intellect, as a distinction-detachment of the various parts of an object and also as a formation of unrelated concepts, is absolutized, then a primarily abstract representation of the object emerges. As is often the case, theoretical knowledge, both within and outside education, seems to be exceedingly abstract, irrelevant to the evolving, living reality and, ultimately, obscure or completely unintelligible, precisely because it is the result of an

accumulation of unrelated concepts. In this case, the theoretical representation of the object portrays it as static and lifeless, while cognition, in its attempt to make sense of it, is invariably hindered by the fragmented concepts (the disconnected and abstract definitions) which, precisely because of their character as such, do not afford cognition in-depth, comprehension of the relationships and interactions between the parts of the object, which would represent its genuine understanding.

The mismatch between this mode of theoretical representation of the object and the actual living, growing object itself, as well as the difficulty of understanding it, are expected to be overcome in the teaching process, by providing a set of examples, that is, moments and instances of the object afforded by the senses and experience. Certainly, regression to experience, to the sensuously concrete form of the object, does not deepen our knowledge of the latter, nor does it transcend the limitations of its conceptually abstract depiction.

The deepening of the knowledge and understanding of an object concerns the reflection of its essence, of the defining dialectic interrelation of its parts. This is realised through the synthesis of the various parts of the object which have been distinguished by the intellect and the constitution of a theoretical-conceptual system, within which each concept presupposes and is interrelated with the rest of them, thus revealing the object as an evolving, developing organic totality of parts. We could say that the actual importance of theoretical knowledge is connected with the intellectual-conceptual representation of an object in the totality of the dialectical relations-interactions among its parts.

What is necessary to be underlined is that the possibility to change things lies in their inherent negativity, i.e. in the existence of internal-determining relations that constitute contradictions (whatever lies outside contradictions lies outside

evolution): "Finite things are, but their relation to themselves is that they are negatively self-related and in this very self-relation send themselves away beyond themselves, beyond their being" (Hegel, 1969, 129). Therefore, the knowledge that primarily supports the transformative activity of humans is related to the theoretical conception and representation of the contradictory relations that determine the genesis and evolution of various objects.

Based on the above, we argue that education, as an activity grounded in teaching, would have no particular social significance if people were able to become active in the labour process and social life, using just their daily experience. The social significance and necessity of education, as an organized and systematic process, in conjunction with the crucial role of teaching and, subsequently, of educators, is related to the transfer of knowledge, which concerns aspects of reality that lie beyond the world directly experienced through the senses, and beyond everyday empirical knowledge. As noted by Vygotsky, during the transfer of a knowledge system, we teach a child not about what is directly before him, but about things "that far exceed the limits of his actual and or even potential immediate experience" (Vygotsky, 1987, 180).

At the same time, education as teaching restructures and fundamentally develops the intellectual abilities of students, and primarily those skills that concern the theoretical-conceptual comprehension and representation of various objects.

The development of the scientific social science concept, a phenomenon that occurs as part of the educational process, constitutes a unique form of systematic cooperation between the teacher and child. The maturation of the child's higher mental functions occurs in this cooperative process, that is, it occurs through the adult's assistance and participation. (Vygotsky, 1987, 168-169)

Education as an organized systematic teaching process has a reason for existence when, as Vygotsky points out, zones of proximal development are created within it; when the mental functions and powers of the children are nurtured and developed through intellectual actions which they carry out jointly and with the assistance of their teacher. At school children are not taught (or at least are not supposed to be taught) what they can do independently, but what is made accessible to them through collaboration with and under the guidance of a teacher (Vygotsky, 1987, 211). The teaching work of educators brings children into contact with theoretical scientific knowledge. Within the framework of this contact, a decisive role is played by children's awareness and volitional control of scientific concepts, which requires an understanding of the specific relations of generality among concepts of a particular system. Awareness of the concepts leads to their volitional-purposeful use (Vygotsky, 1987, 193).

If reasonable thinking concerns the ability to represent the internal, contradictory, dynamic relations of an object with the help of a system of concepts and internally interrelated definitions, then the cultivation of the ability of reasonable thinking is related to the cultivation of the ability to engage in conscious intellectual activity, with the help of concepts and their meanings. This ability involves reflecting upon concepts and, given that concepts and their meanings are creations of the intellect, reasonable thinking also involves understanding the intellect - a reflective act of consciousness, the object of which is the activity of consciousness itself. Consequently, the cultivation of the ability to know the world scientifically is related to a knowledge-understanding of the laws that govern the cognitive process and, therefore, to the cultivation of people's ability to reflect upon their own cognitive activity.

It should be clarified here that people's cognitive inquiry and learning activities do not constitute an automatic process. They are instead activated by their needs, but they acquire meaning and direction by virtue of fundamental elements of human

consciousness, namely, people's meaning of life, ideals and social stance. In this case, we are dealing with the aspects of learning that are exclusively related to consciousness, and make up the cognitive/learning interest. What is worth noting at this point is that people do not acquire knowledge simply because they possess the mental capacity to do so. Learning as knowledge acquisition largely involves the activation of another dimension of consciousness which is associated with perceiving the self as a subject, in its relation with other persons-subjects, and in the interaction of these persons-subjects with objective reality.

### **Consciousness as awareness of social subjectivity**

If the knowledge of things and of their internal substantial relations is essential in order for people to be able to discern the possibilities of a transformative effect upon them, then the cognitive and transformative activity itself, as an activity that is performed within the framework of social relations, is related to the development of another aspect of consciousness, which we would call consciousness in the narrow sense of the word. This is the consciousness that understands the social ties between people, as ties between bearers of consciousness, who are therefore responsible for these ties.

If knowledge, as the first aspect of consciousness, stems from the labour-transformative interaction of humans with objective reality and reflects nature and humans mainly as objects (it reflects their objective properties-characteristics), the second aspect of social consciousness stems from labour relations and, broadly speaking, from the social relations among humans, and the need to consciously regulate these relations, to consciously affect other people. For this reason, it reflects humans as subjects, as beings who can be conscious of their relations to others as relations regulated by their consciousness (Vazjulin, 1988, 156-157).

People, as bearers of this second aspect of consciousness, perceive their ties with others as ties that depend on their intentional actions, and therefore as ties that can be affected and transformed by these actions. From this perspective, people-bearers of social consciousness are also bearers of self-consciousness: their perception of social ties with others as ties between subjects is related to the perception of each person's individual subjectivity, and the difference of every person from other people within the framework of his/her social connection with them.<sup>iii</sup>

What is fundamentally important to understand is that people are subjects precisely because they are social beings, given that society represents a unity of individual persons, the totality of their relations with one another. Thus, people are conscious of themselves, i.e., they have self-consciousness – a perception of their individual unified self, because they are conscious of their social unity with other people, each of whom constitutes an individual unified self.

The basic forms of this second aspect of consciousness include morality, aesthetics and philosophy.<sup>iv</sup> In all these three forms, the same thing is realised and expressed, that is, the awareness of the social bond among individuals, as a bond among subjects, bearers of consciousness/self-consciousness, who are therefore responsible for this bond. Morality, aesthetics and philosophy are the main forms of social consciousness whereby people's conscious stance towards their sociality is manifested and through which other people's consciousness is affected. What differentiates these three forms is that, in morality, the awareness of the social bond is primarily expressed through actions (without this meaning that thoughts and emotions do not play a part in its constitution), in aesthetics the awareness of the social bond is primarily realised through feelings-emotions and expressed through aesthetic equivalents (aesthetic forms), while in philosophy it is realised through thoughts and expressed through conceptual systems.

As regards morality, it should be clarified that in any intentional human action directed, in one way or another, towards other human beings, besides its purely cognitive aspect, which ensures its optimum execution, its conscious aspect par excellence (the individual's conscious attitude towards others) is also manifested. This attitude may be conducive to people's personal development, to the maintenance and enhancement of the ties of comradeship and solidarity that link them to each other, or it may be an attitude of rivalry-hostility towards others, an attitude contrary to the preservation and reinforcement of social ties. Conscious acts serving to sustain and strengthen unity among people, to promote the preservation and progressive evolution of humanity in its totality, are defined by the concept of goodness (Vazjulin, 1988, 165). The notion of goodness represents the practical expression of an individual's understanding of his/her own sociality as conscious actions aiming at preserving and developing this sociality.

Fostering the moral aspect of consciousness is closely associated with the character of the whole set of social relations, as expressed and experienced in human actions. Therefore, the moral stance that best corresponds to the concept of goodness presupposes the development of personality in the context of relations of solidarity. It therefore requires a powerful experience of collectivity and comradeship within social groups whose actions seek to advance universal human unity.

If relations of comradeship among people are prevalent in society, morality is the primary factor guiding human actions, as inner guidance grounded in the awareness of the social importance of these actions. For this reason, as Marx and Engels note, "under human conditions punishment will really be nothing but the sentence passed by the culprit on himself" (Marx and Engels, 1975, 179).

Of course, when class division, as well as relations of exploitation of man by man and experience of alienation and antagonism prevail in society, it is only by way of exception that moral consciousness, in its most mature form, can be developed. In the above-mentioned social conditions, the conscious actions that best correspond to the concept of goodness are aligned with the practical struggle against class society aiming at the emancipation of labor and a genuine unification of humanity.

The aesthetic form of consciousness pertains primarily to the emotional perception and expression of the social bond between the individual and others, of their relationship to the natural and social conditions in which this bond emerges and grows. The aesthetic consciousness arises through the transcription of a variety of emotional stances towards the world into the aesthetic forms that best express them.

The reflection of the essence of human relations, of the crucial and determinant aspects of the social condition, in aesthetics, through aesthetic forms, is denoted by the concept of beauty. "Beauty, insofar as it is peculiar to humans, is the reflection of the essential, the nomic, the inner, etc., in their sensuous equivalent" (Vazjulin, 1988, 176). At the same time, beauty pertains to the aesthetic depiction of a better, harmonious human world; it is the fullest possible aesthetic conception of perfection in any given social-historical context.

The aesthetic form of consciousness is manifested in all aspects of human activity, with art being its privileged field of expression. In art, internal, aesthetic forms are externalized through sounds, colours, materials, words and movements, and transmitted to individuals, evoking feelings and thoughts, and thus developing a synchronic and diachronic communication between them. Accordingly, art, as a privileged expression of aesthetic consciousness, is inherently educative in character. Art exercises and shapes people's ability to sense

the world together with others, emotionally distinguishing the essential, defining aspects of human existence.

Art is the edification of our sensibility exactly as social sensibility. As Vygotsky notes, "Initially, an emotion is individual, and only by means of a work of art does it become social or generalized" (Vygotsky, 1971, 243), and continues: "Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life" (Vygotsky, 1971, 249). Ilyenkov remarks that in art our sensibility further develops as imagination, namely,

as the ability to see things through the eyes of another person (without, of course, turning into him in reality), through the eyes of all other people, through the eyes of mankind, and to see not from the point of view of my individual interests, needs, and desires, but from the point of view of the long-term interests of the human "race". (Ilyenkov, 2007, 82)

At the same time, in externalizing the aesthetic conception of perfection, art detects and displays alternative perspectives of the human condition, and in this way emotionally motivates people, mobilizes and directs their transformative social activity: "Art is the organization of our future behavior. It is a requirement that may never be fulfilled but that forces us to strive beyond our life toward all that lies beyond it" (Vygotsky, 1971, 253).

The philosophical form of consciousness concerns the reflection through thoughts, that is, in general form, of the social ties between people as subjects. Philosophy takes into account the knowledge of the human world in its objective dimensions, as is advanced in the various fields of scientific inquiry. However, being a form of social consciousness in itself and not a mere science, it deals primarily with people's reflection as subjects, as beings that bear consciousness and self-consciousness, and

deliberately decide, within the range of actual possibilities, how to exist and act in a given objective reality.

The central issue of philosophy is not merely knowing the objective reality, the objective (physical and social) conditions of existence, but reflecting on how people as subjects, in their social unity, interact with the material conditions of their existence (Vazjulin, 1988, 185). Philosophy examines the relation of consciousness to being and, for this reason, constitutes a self-reflection of consciousness, a consciousness which investigates the content of consciousness (Vazjulin, 1988, 189).

From this perspective, truth is a philosophical concept par excellence concerned with the examination of the interaction between human consciousness and objective reality, the congruence/incongruence relation between them, asserting maximum correspondence between the content of consciousness and objective reality. At this point, it should be clarified, that truth should not be understood as correctness, as the expression of a mere correlation between consciousness and whichever aspect of reality. The concept of truth involves realizing the essence of things, their defining, nomic relations, as well as developing the plan of human activity and consciously acting upon the physical reality based on knowledge of the essence.

It should be noted, incidentally, that the concepts of goodness, beauty and truth, as presented above, are internally interconnected, one presupposing the others. These concepts signify the optimal expression, in actions, emotions and thoughts, of people's sociality, the maximum degree of awareness of sociality and, therefore, as Ilyenkov remarks, "the harmonious combination of truth, goodness and beauty - serves as a criterion of maturity of genuinely human relationships" (Ilyenkov, 1984, 311).

Philosophy as form of consciousness is connected with peoples' need to intentionally decide on how they will exist within objective reality; it concerns the effort of consciousness to formulate the strategy of human existence, the fundamental aims of people's life and activity. In formulating these aims, and in endeavoring to implement them, the human being emerges predominantly as a subject. Philosophy, therefore, is the form of consciousness where the constitution of human subjectivity culminates.

The formation of the main purposes of human life is related to the concept of the ideal. The term "ideal" is used to describe people's perception of perfection (of a perfect society, a perfect personality, a perfect way of life). Perfection is the state in which the development of something has been completed, all of its parts have been developed to the utmost, the contradictions of the present have been overcome, and human needs have been satisfied to an optimum extent.

Philosophically conceiving perfection involves the uniquely human, purely cultural ability to ideally reconstruct things in a way that allows for them to be presented to our consciousness not in their actual, but in their potentially complete form, which stems from knowing their inherent evolutionary tendencies. The concept of perfection provides the foundation for philosophically determining the prospects of life, the highest, the most fundamental aims of human existence, which traverses all other individual objectives, i.e., the ideal.

Hence, the development of consciousness through education, as well as through all moments of social life, to such a degree as to enable people to transform and shape reality jointly with others, is on the one hand associated with the acquisition of knowledge with respect to the essential aspects of reality (physical and social) and the cultivation of cognitive abilities. On the other hand, it concerns the cultivation of the moral, the aesthetic and the philosophical form of consciousness, i.e., the ability to comprehend and express through actions, emotions

and thoughts the social bond between the self as subject and other people-subjects.

A genuine education of human beings, therefore, in the sense of forming and developing their consciousness, involves cultivating a dual ability to understand the world (and oneself) in its objective actuality and to perceive oneself (through actions, emotions and thoughts) as a subject socially connected with other people-subjects, and therefore (jointly) responsible for the preservation and development of social ties.

As regards education and personal edification in general, the internal unity between these two aspects of consciousness is also manifested in the fact that the development of the second aspect (the moral, aesthetic and philosophical form of consciousness) decisively influences the acquisition of knowledge, the individual's cognitive activity, education in general, insofar as the last requires meaningful, purposeful efforts on the part of the individual. Education as a result of the individual's purposeful actions is always also self-education.

## **Consciousness and learning interest**

It should be noted that cognitive/learning interest is decisively determined by the way in which people define their needs and life-prospects, by the fundamental aims and ideals that give meaning to their existence. Insofar as education is also self-education, the content of consciousness, in the second aspect of the word, i.e., the individuals' moral principles, aesthetic criteria, philosophical worldviews, together with their meaning of life and ideals, affect and constitute their cognitive/learning interest, the focus, direction, intensity and duration of conscious efforts to gain knowledge and comprehend the world.

Based on the above, it is necessary to examine the kind of meaning of life and conscious life stance that best correspond

with and lead to a genuine interest in profound, uncompromised critical examination and cognition of the world.

Knowing and understanding reality in depth requires a sincere and strong care for the people with whom we share and co-create it as a social-cultural reality. If, through education, individuals assimilate a body of knowledge and a set of forms of intellectual activity with the aid of which their predominantly human-cultural presence in the world is actualized and their cultural union with humanity is achieved, then a necessary condition of an authentic and creative educational experience is the existence/cultivation of a strong, universal interest in human needs and social relationships.

But under the conditions of capitalist society, the discussion on the necessity to examine reality from the point of view of universal human needs and prospects cannot ignore the dominant class contradiction between capital and wage-labour, which underlies every aspect of social life causing alienation and antagonism. In our times, no social prospect can stand above the relation between capital and wage-labour, the contradictions it creates both within broader human relations and within the interaction between society and nature. In a society divided by antagonistic interests, studying the human world from a pan-human point of view means not taking a neutral stance towards the dominant class relations but, quite the opposite, taking the side of those whose class interests best correspond to the universal interests of humankind.

It is from this point of view that we approach the ultimate goal of knowledge activity, the quest for objectivity and truth. It should be underlined that this quest has nothing to do with the absence of material needs, class interests and social ideals. Erich Fromm notes on this issue:

Actually, just as thinking in general has developed out of the need for mastery of material life, so the quest for truth is rooted in the

interests and needs of individuals and social groups. Without such interest the stimulus for seeking the truth would be lacking. There are always groups whose interest is furthered by truth, and their representatives have been the pioneers of human thought; there are other groups whose interests are furthered by concealing truth. Only in the latter case does interest prove harmful to the cause of truth. The problem, therefore, is not that there is an interest at stake, but which kind of interest is at stake. (Fromm, 2001, 214-215)

Within the capitalist society, universal social interests and a pan-human perspective of social development coincide with the strategic class interests of wage-labour, because the emancipation of wage-labour from capitalist exploitation is the only way to establish a genuinely unified humanity. Consequently, considering the social prospect from the point of view of the transcendence of the relation between capital and wage-labour towards a classless, unified society constitutes the utmost universal human interest and also the most authentic cognitive/learning interest, the strongest interest in the objective examination and deep understanding of human condition.

## **Teaching for social emancipation**

The significance of intentional, organized and systematic teaching in individuals' education cannot be overemphasized, as it is the only means by which people can concisely assimilate the achievements of culture in their highest forms. Consequently, education is closely related to the crucial role played by educators, not only because, as Vygotsky showed, they can introduce students to knowledge fields that lie beyond their everyday experience but also because only through the pedagogical interaction between teachers and students can the cognitive abilities of the latter be cultivated and developed.

As follows from the above, it is obvious why teachers are needed in the education process precisely as intellectuals: only teachers who think creatively can contribute to the cultivation

of their students' thinking, involving them into "a mutual creation and re-creation of knowledge" (Shor and Freire, 1987, 8). In the same way, only those with a developed consciousness (cultivated in all three of its forms - moral, aesthetic and philosophical) are in a position to understand in depth the human significance of their work and the social responsibility that it entails, and play a decisive role in developing students' consciousness, in identifying and exploring along with the students the meanings and purposes underlying the most active and creative attitudes towards reality, the strongest cognitive interest in it. However, given the contradictory social and professional conditions in which educators' consciousness is shaped, not all of them function to the same extent as intellectuals, or, alternatively, not all them are intellectuals of the same type.

Here, it would be appropriate to mention the typology of educators as intellectuals introduced by Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux. According to this, educators are classified as hegemonic, accommodating, critical and transformative intellectuals. Through their work, hegemonic intellectuals consciously serve the dominant groups and classes, while accommodating intellectuals, who avoid taking a political stand on the object of their work and the conditions that determine it, accept and adhere to ideas and practices that contribute to the reproduction of dominant social relations (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, 48-49). Both these types, as indicated by the way in which they are defined by Aronowitz and Giroux, are characterized by the absence of critical thinking since, the former more consciously than the latter, take sides with the dominant reality, and thus view it as given, static and immutable. The third type is that of the critical intellectuals, a category which suggests that educators assume a critical posture towards various social issues based on a specific view of their professional role, yet without attaching themselves to specific social interests or engaging in collective social-political struggle (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, 47).

Finally, the type of transformative intellectuals is the category that connects pedagogy with politics, helping students to develop a deep and long-lasting faith in the struggle to overcome injustice and change themselves, while at the same time develop a new attitude towards knowledge whereby “the language of critique unites with the language of possibility when it points to the conditions necessary for new forms of culture, alternative social practices, new modes of communication, and a practical vision for the future”(Aronowitz and Giroux , 1993, 46). Transformative intellectuals seek to transform schools into democratic spheres while they can join with ecology, feminist, peace, trade union and neighborhood groups, bringing “their skills and talents to bear on vital forms of resistance at the local level, for example, locally based efforts against toxic waste dumping, nuclear power, consumer fraud, racial and sexual discrimination” (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, 51).

Considering the above typology of educators as intellectuals, we would like to point out that, for those educators who strive for social change and progress and endeavour to critically educate people, what is of particular importance is how they themselves perceive the content and the prospects of such a change. In order to teach for social transformation and progress, it is crucial to have a profound understanding of the social needs, interests and contradictions that make such a transformation necessary as well as of the direction and content of this transformation.

Transformative intellectuals, as presented in Aronowitz and Giroux’s analysis, are governed by short-term objectives concerning only special social needs and problems, but lack a comprehensive social ideal, an understanding of the characteristics of a possible alternative, emancipated society. It comes as a surprise that transformative intellectuals are positioned outside the class relations and conflicts characterizing capitalist society and portrayed as independent of class interests and class-specific views of social

emancipation.<sup>v</sup> Thus, inevitably their transformative activity is limited to partial changes and improvements of the dominant capitalist society, while the fundamental relations of class exploitation and conflict are kept outside theoretical critique and political contestation.

We have to underline here that educators should not be considered engineers of social transformation. Educators and teaching cannot, under current social conditions, radically change people's views and attitudes. The idea of social progress through education, which was emblematic in the Enlightenment tradition and was strongly advocated by John Dewey and the movement of Progressive Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a typical delusion of the liberal philosophy of education and the social-democratic political ideology. The activity of educators, and any emancipatory impact this has on students, cannot offset the destructive and manipulative influence on people's consciousness, which is exerted by the everyday antagonistic-alienating relations of capitalist society and its ideological mechanisms.

Freire rightly observes that

To think of education independent from the power that constitutes it, divorced from the concrete world where it is forged, leads us either to reducing it to a world of abstract values and ideals (which the pedagogue constructs inside his consciousness without even understanding the conditioning that makes him think this way), or to converting it to a repertoire of behavioral techniques, or to perceiving it as a springboard for changing reality. In fact, it is not education that molds society to certain standards, but society that forms itself by its own standards... (Freire, 1985, 170)

People's personalities change radically when they are engaged in practical activity aimed at a radical transformation of society. And people are massively engaged in the radical change of social relations when they feel and understand that within

these relations they can no longer satisfy their fundamental needs in the way to which they have been accustomed.

However, the radical transformation of society requires the maximum possible awareness of the feasibility, the direction and the content of the revolutionary project. And although an emancipatory education cannot foster such awareness among everybody, it cannot by itself change people's consciousness, it may, however, contribute to the formation of a crucial conscious social vanguard, which will be able to play an active role in the struggles for social change and emancipation.

And it can do so by fostering critical awareness of the dominant relations and ideas. The task of the educators who fight for radical progressive change in society consists, of course, in unveiling the social reality which is being hidden by the dominant ideology and the dominant curriculum (Shor and Freire, 1987, 36). The unveiling of reality is certainly not a socially neutral task. Educators who engage in it need to have a broader social perspective, which clearly presupposes participation in social movements and struggles (Shor and Freire, 1987, 38-39). Yet, an effective unveiling of reality is organically interlinked with its examination not only in the context of the struggle to improve the living conditions in the dominant capitalist society (such a perspective certainly leads to reproducing new illusions), but also in the light of the social interests and struggles aiming to radically change social relations, radically emancipate labour and society. Actually, the most critical approach to social conditions is the approach that deepens the understanding of and strengthens the devotion to a possible alternative and emancipatory social prospect.

Educators cannot fight for a genuine transformation of society unless they are emotionally, ideologically and politically attached to the social force that mostly needs this transformation. And such a force within capitalism is only the class of wage-labourers. Consequently, educators who strive

for social transformation should be perfectly aware of the essential contradiction of capitalist society that necessitates and enables its revolutionary overcoming, and consciously work inside and outside schools, in the fields of social theory and practice, as wage-labour organic intellectuals, contributing to the understanding and expression of its strategic interests, thus serving the cause of the emancipation of labour and humanity.

## Notes

i. As Hegel notes, "Since the man of common sense appeals to his feeling, to an oracle within his breast, he is done with anyone who does not agree. He has just to explain that he has no more to say to anyone who does not find and feel the same as himself. In other words, he tramples the roots of humanity underfoot. For the nature of humanity is to impel men to agree with one another, and its very existence lies simply in the explicit realization of a community of conscious life. What is anti-human, the condition of mere animals, consists in keeping within the sphere of feeling pure and simple, and in being able to communicate only by way of feeling-states" (Hegel, 1971, 127).

ii. Willis comments in that respect: "In the sense, therefore, that I argue that it is their own culture which most effectively prepares some working class lads for the manual giving of their labour power we may say that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in western capitalism. However, this damnation is experienced, paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance" (Willis, 1999, 3).

iii. The concept of the subject has been questioned by currents of thought such as poststructuralism and postmodernism (Heartfield, 2002). Going into greater detail is beyond the scope of this paper, we will, therefore, confine ourselves to noting that the denial of a person's existence as subject, as a bearer of self-consciousness, and hence as being capable of and responsible for intentional actions, have negative consequences for social theory and practice. Not only does it

rule out any possibility of conscious action for change and development in the world, but it also distorts the essential characteristics of humans as social beings and, for this very reason, as bearers of consciousness and conscious self-activity. Paulo Freire is right to note that “To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people” (Freire, 2006, 50). Certainly, social development and change is not determined by individuals; rather, it is a collective project, a matter of interaction and conflict between large social groups. This by no means suggests that people form groups in the same way as amoebae or termites. Precisely because political groupings are not instinctive but formed as a result of people becoming aware of social needs and interests, and adopting common ideas and ideals, the specific cultural-educational processes that shape consciousness and subjectivity are of major importance for the organisation and development of transformative social action.

iv. Other forms of social consciousness, such as religious, legal and political consciousness, are not examined here, because we consider them historically related to the class division of society, and therefore inevitably immature, superficial or false forms.

v. All the categories of intellectuals presented by Aronowitz and Giroux are Weberian-style ideal types, and are subsequently derived from an abstract conception and classification of certain traits rather than an analysis of the social relations and contradictions within which specific types of intellectuals are historically and socially formed.

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