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Emancipation through Education: from the Enlightenment to Pragmatism

The notion of emancipation tends to be associated with the latter half of the 20th century. It is then that the term entered pedagogical and philosophical discourse on a greater scale. However, its history, as well as the history of emancipation itself – conceived as an environment that enables a life of dignity, autonomy and egalitarian participation in the community – goes back much further. This is the story I tell in my book entitled *Emancypacja przez wychowanie, czyli edukacja do wolności, równości i szczęścia* [Emancipation through Education, i.e. Education towards Liberty, Equality and Happiness] (GWP 2011). I begin with the Enlightenment, around which many stereotypes have arisen, making it difficult to reflect on its legacy in a reliable and accurate fashion. It was commonly perceived, whether by conservatives or progressives, as an epoch of the tyranny of reason, of pushing the body into a rigid framework, of subjugation to institutions, of contempt for the aesthetic experience, and so forth. Paradoxically, most of the emancipatory values that we hold dear today, indeed most of the critical perspectives that we recognise today, emerged at that very moment. Is it possible, then, to speak of a linear progress in sensitivity, dating back to the second half of the 18th century? Obviously not. The history of the doctrines of liberation is full of discontinuities and inconsistencies. These manifest themselves in exclusions and omissions, which contradict the universality of the concept of emancipation. When conducting my research, based on the analysis of source texts, I took it upon myself to examine the traces of these historical suppressions and their consequences.

The emancipatory impulse grew particularly strong on the eve of the French Revolution. In that period, it was the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that offered the most significant reflection on both education and social philosophy. As we recall, Émile, the main character of his treatise on pedagogy, was supposed to grow up away from social influences and to learn reasoning by himself, owning "no sway but that of reason"[1]. For instance, he was to choose his own religion or

[1] J.J. Rousseau, *Émile, or Education*, trans. by Barbara Foxley, M.A., London & Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1921; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1921, p. 217.

lack thereof. At the same time, paradoxically, the individualistic upbringing of the boy was supposed to lead to the creation of a close-knit community, where the thoughts of individuals would yield to the common good. The logic of this transition is explained by Rousseau's social philosophy. It represents a self-sufficient "noble savage", meaning a man before the advent of evil civilisation, a civilisation that flings "garlands of flowers" over the "chains" of feudal dependencies weighing people down[2]. However, the alternative to the existing inequalities is not to return to nature, but rather to socialise at a higher level: entering into the social contract. It is about individuals voluntarily surrendering to the outcome of a ballot in which each of them has an equal vote. As a result of the clash of conflicting opinions, a democratic core emerges: the general will. The general will automatically becomes law that must be accepted by individuals even if they disagree with the outcome. This way the "natural freedom" gives way to "civil liberty, which is limited by the general will"[3]. This corresponds to a dialectic transition from Émile's education – first a "noble savage", then a rational individualist – to a collective education based on voluntary identification with a community of equals.

This dialectic later appears in the works of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. The first calls for "a man's release from his self-incurred tutelage"[4] and outlines a vision of "the kingdom of ends". No human being can be treated in it as a means to an end, and always only as an end. This is why the philosopher rejects the existence of the army, i.e. people who are treated as objects on the path to military victory. The aim of education is to bring closer the order in which everyone will be treated as a subject. A child needs to learn to think instead of to believe; to decide for himself or herself, rather than to follow commands. However, the pedagogical measures recommended to achieve these noble goals strike one with their severity and insensitivity to the suffering of the individual. In his pedagogical treatise, Kant advocates a truly military discipline towards children[5], whereas in the *Critique of Practical Reason* adults are expected to follow exaggerated abstract moral norms that prohibit them from stealing or perjury even when their life is at risk. On the other hand, Kant does not allow suicide in the case of unbearable pain[6]. Schiller, who as a young man was subject to an educational regime based on the restrictive recommendations of his predecessor, revised this vision of education and morality, deeming it "grace repelling". Its severity is replaced by freedom and fun, deriving

[2] J.J. Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences*, in J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses by Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. with an Introduction by G.D.H. Cole, London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1923. p. 131.

[3] J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses by Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* trans. with an Introduction by G.D.H. Cole, London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons 1923, p.19.

[4] I. Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment,* Penguin Books, London 2009.

[5] See I. Kant, *On Education (ueber Paedagogik),* trans. by Annette Churton, introduction by C.A. Foley Rhys Davids, Boston: D.C. Heath and Co. 1900.

[6] See I. Kant, *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, B.D., Fellow and Tutor of Trinity College, Dublin, 4th revised ed., London: Kongmans, Green and Co. 1889.

from Kant's aesthetics, which define beauty as "purposiveness without purpose"[7]. Schiller's *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* constitute a great praise of spontaneity, freedom and creativity[8]. The same enthusiasm is expressed in his *Ode to Joy*, for which the music was written by another great supporter of the Enlightenment, Ludwig van Beethoven.

The philosopher's reference to the creative and vital potentials that lie hidden in man was seized by Herbert Marcuse, a much later theoretician advocating the unleashing of the suppressed powers of eroticism and the imagination. Schiller, however, unlike his successor, does not value spontaneity in itself. He does not perceive beauty and play as an end in itself or as desirable features of social order, but rather as a means of ensuring that human drives are effectively harnessed in the service of reason, the same reason on which Kant based his restrictive ethics and rigorous pedagogy, as well as his vision of social policy. Contrary to what it may seem, however, the latter is not democratic at all. Both philosophers feared allowing the lower classes to make political decisions and were in favour of an absolute monarchy. As pointed out by Terry Eagleton[9], in their metaphors this monarchy embodies reason, while the force of the senses, the drive, corresponding to the masses, should, according to Schiller, "lend all the fire of its feelings to a celebration of a triumph over itself"[10]. The same applies to women who, despite being associated with the values of sensitivity and beauty lauded by the philosopher, do not deserve civil rights. This is also Kant's legacy, who excluded women from the political community on grounds that may seem surprising, given his pacifist inclinations. He argued that a "woman, regardless of age, is declared to be immature in civil matters" because "just as it does not belong to women to go to war, so women cannot personally defend their rights and pursue civil affairs for themselves"[11]. It is worth noting that the military components of education perfectly match this vision of citizenship.

Both the aforementioned representatives of German idealism (followed, among others, by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) drew on the social philosophy of Rousseau in this respect. Women are not involved in the establishment of social contracts and their voices do not form part of the general will. They are only meant to form the silent foundations of the political community of men, whose needs and desires they are obliged to fulfil. No wonder then that Émile's chapter on raising a girl is in stark contrast to how the boy is to be treated. While Émile was to think for himself, without any external authority, his future partner, Sophie, was to rely

[7] See I. Kant *Kant's Critique of Judgement,* trans. with Introduction and Notes by J.H. Bernard (2nd ed. revised), London: Macmillan 1914.

[8] See F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. with an Introduction by Reginald Snell, Dover Publications Inc., Mineola New York 2004.

[9] Terry Eagleton, *Schiller and Hegemony,* in: T. Eagleton, *The ideology of the aesthetic,* Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford-Cambridge 1990, p. 111.

[10] Jane V. Curran and Christophe Fricker (eds.), *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in Its Cultural Context: Essays and a New Translation*, Rochester, NY: Camden House 2005.

[11] I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Mary J. Gregor, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1974, p. 80.

on them unreservedly. When it comes to raising a girl, Rousseau says: "it is as well to observe that, until the age when the reason becomes enlightened, when growing emotion gives a voice to conscience, what is wrong for young people is what those about have decided to be wrong. What they are told to do is good; what they are forbidden to do is bad; that is all they ought to know"[12]. The question of the choice of religion, so important in Émile's case, is not posed at all in relation to Sophie. She is simply to learn the truths of the parents' faith and abide by them for the rest of her life. She should also stay away from the abstract sciences, and in constant proximity to the mirror, because it is beauty, and not self-awareness, that is most important for her future. In Rousseau's vision, women are expected to get used to the fact that male opinion governs their lives from childhood onwards.

It is therefore evident that the tradition of thinking about politics and education originating from Jean-Jacques Rousseau contradicts its own emancipatory declarations. For a long time, however, both philosophical and pedagogical works have ignored the issue of women's exclusion. According to Carole Pateman, this was due to the lack of reflection on the third flagship value of the French Revolution, alongside liberty and equality. Fraternity is accepted to be another expression of solidarity between people, whereas in her opinion it should be understood more literally: as a community of men founded upon the subordination of women[13]. Contrary to the reasons commonly given for the omission of women from philosophical concepts as something taken for granted in early modernity, there was no lack of criticism of this approach, as well as of alternative concepts of social emancipation. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* presents a vision of education in which girls learn to think for themselves and are not yet groomed into weakness and cowardice, which translates into the professional and personal independence of adult women[14]. The philosopher points out many inconsistencies in Rousseau's argument about Sophie, such as the fact that if women by nature only want to appeal to and listen to men, why is he calling for so many restrictive educational measures to achieve this? Contrary to the "fraternal" definition of the public sphere, she believes that motherhood not only does not negate civic identity, but should in fact be one of its cornerstones, on the same footing as working peacefully for the good of society. Conversely, membership of a political community cannot be made conditional on the bearing of arms, as the army is a school of dangerous irrationality.

Jean Antoine Condorcet, one of Wollstonecraft's contemporaries, was also a critic of Jean-Jacques Rousseau with respect to his emancipatory positions. He rejected Rousseau's militarism and his exclusion of women. He created a project

[12] J. J. Rousseau, *Émile, or Education*, trans. by Barbara Foxley, M.A., London & Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1921; New York: E.P. Dutton 1921, p. 344.

[13] Carole Pateman, *The Fraternal Social Contract* in: C. Pateman *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory,* Polity Press 1989.

[14] See M. Wollstonecraft, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman: A Sourcebook*, Adriana Craciun (ed.), Routledge, New York 2013.

of free, co-educational instruction for children and adults from all social classes, allowing the geographically and culturally excluded to attend school[15]. He opposed racism and rejected colonialism, calling for the right to "to participate in […] independence, […] liberty, and […] illumination"[16] for non-whites. He believed that technological progress would improve society, and his predictions of future inventions, such as airplanes, were astoundingly accurate. However, he warned against the rule of the knowledgeable elites over the ignorant masses, which would not differ much from the power of the clergy, which, according to him, would prey on the ignorance of the faithful. He also recognized the danger of relying on people's enthusiasm, rightful as it may be, when it did not permit criticism. In his scientific research and teaching practice, he insisted on the right to make mistakes, the equivalent of which, as far as society is concerned, was the acceptance of dissenting opinions and criticism.

This shows that John Stuart Mill with his essay on *The Subjection of Women* was not, as the prevailing teaching curricula might otherwise suggest, the first feminist philosopher. While fighting for women's political rights, economic independence and personal freedom, he considered it desirable for them to fulfil their role primarily within the family. It is only after the children have grown up, or if they do not have any, that he believes women are ready to take up a professional or political career. His wife Harriet Taylor Mill believed otherwise, and in her essay *The Enfranchisement of Women*[17] she advocated access to civic activity also for pregnant women and women caring for children. However, neither she nor her husband mention that someone other than the mother or a woman hired for this purpose could possibly take over the childcare duties. At that time, some socialists already demanded that crèches be set up. On the other hand, other leftists called for a ban on women's work, combined with a wage raise for men, sufficient to support the family. Taylor Mill challenged this view, arguing that a ban on child labour would be much more desirable. She cited Robert Owen, philosopher, MP and social activist, who, outraged by the fact that, at the beginning of the 19th century, children as young as 7 or 8 years old were working in factories like adults, i.e. up to 13 or even 14 hours a day, submitted a draft of an "industrial emancipation" bill to Parliament in 1815. This included a ban on child labour under the age of 12 and a limitation of its duration to 12 hours with a mandatory break of 1.5 hours for minors between the ages of 12 and 18. In a much more relaxed form, it was possible to introduce these demands into existing law after four years.

Owen also drew the attention of the public to the scandal of punishing proletarian and lumpenproletarian children for crimes directly resulting from their dire

[15] See J.A. Condorcet, *The Nature and Purpose of Public Instruction* in: *Condorcet: Selected Writings*, Bobbs-Merrill 1976.

[16] J.A. Condorcet, *Outlines of an historical view of the progress of the human mind, being a posthumous work of the late M. de Condorcet*, (Translated from the French), Philadelphia: M. Carey 1796, p. 154.

[17] See H. Taylor Mill, *The Enfranchisement of Women*, http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/book-sum/ht_mill3.html.

circumstances or caused by their ignorance through no fault of their own[18]. They received sentences as harsh as adults, and there was no hesitation in sentencing them to death. The philosopher also took the side of adults, who had previously been such children, and whose fate had by no means changed as they reached adulthood. Owen, however, did not stop at stigmatising the shortcomings of the penal system and fighting for a more humane employment policy. Even before he started his parliamentary activity, he was active as a social reformer on a limited, experimental scale. In his weaving plants in New Lanark, the working hours were shortened and a number of educational, cultural and entertainment activities were introduced for the employees and their children. In the ideal society that he designed, and because of which his ideas were called "utopian", the division between the rich and the poor, between the countryside and the city, was to be abolished. People were to live in aesthetic buildings, surrounded by workplaces and agricultural landscapes. Housekeeping activities, which until now had been carried out with a great deal of effort and expense at home, would be undertaken by public institutions. The upbringing of children would also be largely taken over by the collective. The women, released from the burden, were to be given full personal and political rights. Religion would be a matter of choice, not coercion, and condemnation of those who departed from the faith would become impossible when believers of different faiths began to pray together in the same sanctuary of worship.

Charles Fourier radicalized Owen's views, developing them in the direction dictated by artistic imagination[19]. In his vision, people were to live in palaces, eat together and cook delicious, gourmet meals, appreciated by feasters. Personal life, including eroticism, was to be shifted to the public sphere, where it would take on exuberant libertine forms. The fulfilment of drives and the desire for beauty would be combined with labour, hence called "attractive labour". Children had a special role to play in this vision. Babies would already be entrusted to the collective of women who demonstrated genuine maternal instincts, alien, in the opinion of the philosopher, to most females. Later on, these youngsters would find themselves under the wing of other children, namely those from older age groups. All of them would actively participate in the life of the community called Phalanstère, where they would be entrusted with various responsible functions, including the cleaning of the toilets, in keeping with the children's fascination with impurity. Fourier thus responded wittily and with psychological sensitivity to the question that has been asked of all utopists for centuries, namely who will be carrying out the dirtiest jobs in an ideal society. Governance was to be thoroughly democratic in Phalanstère, with everyone choosing the title they like or enjoy. The same applies to religion, which was to fill the life of the community in its many, non-orthodox and completely voluntary forms, excluding only the dogmas of hatred.

[18] See G. Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, Routledge 2015.
[19] See Ch. Fourier, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I–XII, Paris: Anthropos 1966–1968.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels distanced themselves from Owen's and Fourier's views, but they did borrow more from them than they admitted. They advocated the right to divorce and illegitimate children, the introduction of crèches to relieve working mothers, public canteens and laundries, and education based on respect for work and incorporating its elements. Just like their predecessors, they were sensitive to the hardships suffered by children in the realities of the capitalist society. They condemned childrens' widespread employment and described their working conditions in factories as follows: "Dante would have found the worst horrors of his Inferno surpassed in this manufacture"[20]. What Marx and Engels disliked about the programme of Utopian socialists, apart from its fantastic element, was the overly specific vision of a happy society and the fact that it was to be achieved through peaceful reforms. The authors of the *Communist Manifesto*, on the other hand, believed that it was the revolution that would determine the shape of the future society, which could not be predicted by the people shaped by the current reality. It was anchored in the claim that it is the social being that determines consciousness, but it unjustly reduced education, a practice with the potential for change at least equal to that of revolution, to economic change.

It was Antonio Gramsci[21] who answered the question "How to educate educators" within Marxism. Referring to the famous statement from *The German Ideology* that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas"[22], he observes that it is never the case that there is only one ideology reflecting material relations. We should rather talk about various "tectonic layers" of consciousness, some of which no longer correspond to material relations, while others constitute a premonition of an egalitarian future. The role of educators is to become aware of the current type of "organic ideology" and to have a bearing on it. Of course, the most difficult thing to do is to convince people, especially the uneducated, of new, revolutionary views, even if they represent their interests. Therefore, the intellectual refinement of the emancipatory vision must be linked to the familiarity with the material life and mindset of the people. In the future society, the philosopher wants to introduce a "single school", that is, one that is free and offers the same comprehensive education to all children. It would to a large extent remove them from their parents' environment and introduce into their lives entirely new ideas and skills, which they would not acquire in their family homes, soaked in "folklore" ways of thinking. As we can see, in modern socialist thought, the family did not enjoy a good press. It was meant to have as little impact on children as possible, and the hope for reform was mainly sought in external institutions.

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[20] K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (1867)*, Trans. from the 3rd German edition, by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels. Revised and amplified according to the 4th German ed. by Ernest Untermann, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co. 1909, p. 272.

[21] See A. Gramsci, D. Forgacs (ed.), *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, NYU Press 2000.

[22] K. Marks, F. Engels, *The German Ideology, including Theses on Feuerbach*, Prometheus Books 1998.

At the same time, another radical educational concept was being developed overseas. At first glance, John Dewey's proposals were no different from those put forward by the European emancipation pedagogy. According to him, children should become aware of civil rights and equality during their education and their interests should develop organically, which did not mean that they should develop without the presence of discipline, including self-discipline[23]. It was important that they learned about and respected the key role of work. This was to be combined with the acquisition of artistic sensitivity, which would make work, like science before, a source of happiness and satisfaction. However, the American proposed a new theoretical basis for this purpose. His theory not only called for democracy and explained its principles, but was also intended to be its explicit articulation. Many of the philosophies to-date have failed in this respect, because "they have at bottom been committed to the principle of a single, final and unalterable authority from which all lesser authorities are derived. The men who questioned the divine right of kings did so in the name of another absolute. The voice of the people was mythologized into the voice of God"[24]. Meanwhile, the "democratic ideal" of Dewey's pragmatism has nothing to do with any superimposed ahistorical truth, because it always originates from the current situation, from the attitudes and tendencies of individuals and society that prevail in a given moment of time. This means that there is no instance external to the material world, and the truth is what at the moment proves to be a valid solution. The philosopher did not consider revolution to be the way forward, as he believed it to perpetuate the old ways of thinking, based on binary divisions. On the contrary, he believed in thorough, simultaneous reforms of the economic sphere and education.

Focusing on the present situation did not mean that education could do without history. Children were to learn about the history of the United States by learning about the pioneers' struggles and performing their daily activities, which was to spark practical inventions. In the vision of the past passed on to children, there was no mention of robbing the indigenous peoples of America of their land or of the atrocities of slavery. Instead, a vision of a fertile blend of cultures, among which the philosopher does not mention African or Indian, was to be fostered. Also when it comes to women, it would be difficult to call his views emancipatory. In his opinion, feminism was one of the socialist extremes, and he considered it desirable to empower women only if it served to improve relations within the family and its general well-being. Nevertheless, pragmatism, with its aversion to dualism and immovable truth and emphasis on practice, has become an effective weapon for civil movements in the United States. It has also influenced the critical sociology of Jürgen Habermas, which is important to me not only as a philosophy of emancipation, but also from a methodological point of view. According to

[23] J. Dewey, Reginald D. Archambault (ed.), *On Education. Selected Writings*, University of Chicago Press, 1974.

[24] See J. Dewey, *Philosophy and Democracy*, [in:] *The Essential Dewey,* Vol. I, *Pragmatism, Education, Democracy,* L.A. Hickman, T.M. Alexander (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998, p. 77.

Habermas's guidelines, the study of history should be based on allowing the voice of the emancipatory aspirations of the past and entering into dialogue with them. I hope that I have succeeded in doing so, thereby bringing closer the fulfilment of the demands of emancipation of the present day.

Summary

Emancipation through Education: from the Enlightenment to Pragmatism

How to characterize the term "emancipation through education"? Emancipation is the process which leads to social equality, political freedom and a real possibility of individual progress for every human being. An egalitarian education means that knowledge is available for everybody irrespective of his or her social class, sex, race and nationality. It helps people from the oppressed or discriminated groups to fight injustice and teaches them how to defend their already achieved rights. The idea of emancipation through education understood in such a way emerged in the period of the Enlightenment, which encompassed the times before, during and right after the French Revolution. Then this idea evolved through the whole modern era, which ends with the beginning of the Second World War. In my essay *Emancipation Through Education: from Enlightenment to Pragmatism* I study the emancipatory threads present in the philosophical theories of such thinkers as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jean Antoine Condorcet, Mary Wollstonecraft, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Antonio Gramsci and John Dewey. My research showed me that some of the modern thinkers held an emancipatory position in some parts of their ideas while in the other parts of their thought they remained conservative. For example, Rousseau, one of the fathers of emancipatory pedagogy, was against the participation of women in the public space. Another example is using the power of beauty and joy to bring the "impulsive" masses under the control of the "rational" elites in Schiller's vision of the aesthetic pedagogy. I analyse these "omissions" using critical discourses such as the philosophy of the feminist thinker Carole Pateman and the Marxist theoretician Terry Eagleton.

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