Dewey's and Freire's popular philosophies of education in a capitalist context

Las filosofías de la educación popular de Dewey y Freire en el contexto capitalista

Les philosophies populaires de l’éducation de Dewey et de Freire dans un contexte capitaliste

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ABSTRACT
This article looks at Dewey’s and Freire’s popular philosophies of education in light of their views of the relation between common sense and scientific inquiry. Dewey’s view, unlike that of Freire, requires the data to be radically reorganized so that the inductive data cannot really be considered merely a reorganizing of common-sense experience. Dewey, though, does not apply his own characterization of scientific inquiry to his critique of capitalist relations; his criticism constitutes an external critique of capitalism via his concept of a cultural lag. Freire, too, criticizes capitalist relations not on its own terms but externally, via his humanist ethical condemnation of treating human subjects as objects. Marx, on the other hand, proposes an internal critique of capitalist relations, starting with the contradictory inductive unit of the commodity that parallels Dewey’s concept of scientific induction. Freire, despite his different conception of scientific inquiry, shares Marx’s interest in the working class and provides a complementary educational approach by addressing the working class’ experience of fear, by counteracting the denigration of working-class experience and by arguing against the claim of neutrality in inquiry in a capitalist context. A synthesis of the three philosophies would therefore serve better the educational needs of the working class.

Keywords: John Dewey, Paulo Freire, popular education, capitalism, pedagogy

RESUMEN
Este artículo examina las filosofías de la educación popular de Dewey y de Freire a la luz de sus opiniones sobre la relación entre el sentido común y las investigaciones científicas. La opinión de Dewey, al contrario de la de Freire, requiere que los hechos sean radicalmente reorganizados de modo que los hechos inductivos no se puedan considerar solo como una forma reorganizada de la experiencia del sentido común. Dewey, sin embargo, no aplica su propia caracterización de las investigaciones científicas a su crítica de las relaciones capitalistas; su crítica constituye una crítica externa del capitalismo por medio de su concepto de un retraso cultural. Freire, también, critica las relaciones capitalistas, no en sus propios términos, sino externamente, por medio de su condena ética humanista del hecho de tratar a los sujetos humanos como objetos. Marx, por otro lado, propone una crítica interna de las relaciones capitalistas, comenzando con la unidad inductiva contradictoria de la mercancía, que tiene su paralelo en el concepto de la inducción científica de Dewey. Freire, a pesar de su concepción distinta de las investigaciones científicas, comparte el
Two sources of popular education have been John Dewey's democratic philosophy of education and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Both, in their own ways, try to develop popular education by linking common-sense experience to scientific inquiry. However, although their views on the nature of common-sense experience overlap, their views on the nature of scientific inquiry differ since Dewey’s theory of scientific inquiry is much more rigorous than that of Freire. Nonetheless, Dewey does not apply his theory of scientific inquiry to his criticisms of capitalist reality. It is argued that Marx’s critical analysis of capitalist reality provides such a theory of scientific inquiry of capitalist reality.

Both Dewey and Freire, in their own distinctive ways, offer an external critique of capitalist relations that is inconsistent with Dewey’s own theory of scientific induction. Marx offers such an inductive process, starting with the commodity as the inductive unit of analysis. Freire, educationally, complements this starting point by the incorporation of issues of fear among the working class, by efforts to counter denigration of working-class experience, and by recognizing the ideological nature of the claim of neutral inquiry in a capitalist context. Popular education requires a synthesis of all three if it is to address the educational needs of the working class.

Accordingly, the first section of the following essay outlines Dewey’s and Freire’s views on the nature of scientific inquiry and its relation to common-sense experience. The essay then
shifts focus to a consideration of their views on capitalism in the second section. Such a shift is justified by Dewey's own view about the specification of the kind of society in which we live as a precondition for determining the kind of education that is needed: “All this reinforces the statement which opens this chapter: ‘The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind’” (Dewey, 1916/1980a, 103). Thus, the nature of a particular kind of social life will influence the kind of education that should be sought. In order to determine the adequacy of a particular educational theory and practice, therefore, it is necessary to inquire into the specific nature of the society in which we live. The society in which we live is capitalist. Consequently, popular education needs to incorporate an analysis and critique of capitalist relations if it is to be adequate to the task of providing a critical popular education. In the third section, accordingly, I describe Marx's internal critique of capitalism and link such a critique to Dewey's view on the nature of induction in scientific inquiry. I then point out and describe some of Freire's principles of pedagogy that fill in some gaps in Dewey's approach and are more consistent with Marx's approach: the pedagogue's need to address fear, characteristic of much working-class experience, the pedagogue's need to resist the tendency to denigrate working-class experience (evident in much academic discourse), and the pedagogue's need to understand that inquiry is never neutral in the context of capitalist relations.

Common Sense and Scientific Inquiry

Dewey postulates a need for a shift from common sense to scientific inquiry because of two limitations of human nature: the focus on ends rather than on means and the bias of social custom (Harris, 2014). Since humans are living beings, they tend to be concerned naturally with ends rather than with the means required to obtain those ends: “… man is naturally more interested in consummations than he is in preparations” (Dewey, 1925/1981, 71). Common-sense inquiry is generally limited to inquiry into achieving qualitative ends (what people aim for in their daily lives), whether positive (a use value) or negative (avoidance of something harmful):

... a generalization of the inquiries and conclusions of this type under the caption of “use and enjoyment” needs much exposition for its support. Use and enjoyment are the ways in which human beings are directly connected with the world about them. Questions of food, shelter, protection, defense, etc., are questions of the use to be made of materials of the environment and of the attitudes to be taken practically towards members of the same group and to other groups taken as wholes. … If we include the correlative negative ideas of disuse, of abstinence from use, and toleration and suffering, problems of use and enjoyment may be safely said to exhaust the domain of common sense inquiry. (1938/1986, 69)

The reader can think of any number of examples which, though they may seem trivial, form the daily actions of most people as they live their lives for the purpose of enjoyment (or to avoid pain). For instance, if a person wants to watch a particular television programme, but the remote is nowhere to be found, then the person may formulate a hypothesis about its probable location (using a combination of memory and immediate observation). She may then test that hypothesis by looking in a specific place to see whether the remote is there. Of course, such a person had to learn to transform their immediate desire for an end into at least some form of control process over her actions if she is to engage successfully in daily living. Otherwise, she might throw a temper tantrum. Even this example, though involving some form of controlled inquiry, has as its ultimate goal a definite end (watching television), and the means used (observation, memory and the formulation and execution of an hypothesis), are subordinate to that end.
This bias towards ends is reinforced by social customs prevalent at a certain epoch (Stuhr, 2002). Human beings, for instance, have historically confused their experiences as social beings (as members of social groups) with the nature of the physical world, projecting their social relations onto the relations between physical objects. The ancient Greek philosophers, for instance, often mistakenly ascribed aesthetic characters to the purely physical world (Dewey, 1920); for Greek intellectuals, the physical world had its own telos or final cause. In modern times, the bias of treating money as if it were merely a physical thing with magical powers rather than powers that arise from specific social relations also shows the need for controlling social inquiry.

Furthermore, historically, custom (the established habits of a specific group of individuals sharing in a certain way of living) has tended to be conservative in consequences. Adults in particular have been concerned with preserving the past or reproducing it (Harris, 2007). However, the emphasis on the past contradicts the nature of the life process since all living beings must deal with the future in some fashion. The nature of life requires both a balance between the present moment (spatial focus) and what lies ahead in the future (time) (Dewey, 1916/1980a). Human beings need to control their personal and social biases if they are to infer real connections rather than develop a fantastic world that has little to do with the real connections in the natural (and social) world (Dewey, 1933).

To eliminate biases stemming from humans, on the one hand, as living beings and, on the other, as social beings, it is necessary to control the conditions within which inquiry occurs: a method. The method of common-sense inquiry is, for Dewey, hardly sufficient to provide for maximum self-control of the social and physical environment in and through which people live since it is too much influenced by the double bias of human beings. It is modern scientific inquiry that constitutes the method for minimizing (though never eliminating) that double bias.

Although scientific inquiry forms the best method hitherto for controlling the double bias of human beings, scientific inquiry ought to be instrumental to common sense since the initial problems ultimately arise within common-sense experience, and the solutions offered by scientific inquiry must address and connect to those problems. The common concern of human beings with use and enjoyment (and avoidance of pain and suffering) constitutes the center around which science must revolve if it is to have any function at all: “But careful examination promptly discloses that unless the materials involved can be traced back to the material of common sense concerns there is nothing whatever for science to be concerned with” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1989, 252).

The problems with which common sense deals are teleological. These problems set the stage for the point of departure into scientific inquiry. Scientific inquiry, in other words, emerges from common-sense inquiry, which can deal only with problems in a limited contextual manner, not furnishing sufficient control when minimization of the double bias is required. The facts of common-sense inquiry, for instance, are not sculpted to perform their evidential function as means that function to point to an adequate solution:

The particulars of observations which are experimentally instituted not only form the subject-matter of a problem so as to indicate an appropriate mode of solution, but are also such as to have evidential and testing value with respect to indicated modes of solution. Operations are deliberately performed that experimentally modify given antecedent objects of perception so as to produce new data in a new ordered arrangement. Institution of new data which are relevant and effective with respect to any conclusion that is hypothetically entertained, forms the most dispensable and difficult part of inquiry in the natural sciences. Objects and
qualities as they naturally present themselves or as they are “given,” are not only
not the data of science but constitute the most direct and important obstacle to
formation of those ideas and hypotheses that are genuinely relevant and effective.
(1938/1986, 420-421)

The data of common-sense inquiry are inadequate to perform the control function of evidence in
relation to the specific problem to be resolved when that problem requires to be grounded
sufficiently to be applicable across a variety of situations rather than limited to a specific situation
guided by the specific concerns of those engaged in inquiry. Thus, scientific inquiry in astronomy
was impeded because of the common-sense data used: the apparently fixed nature of the Earth
(Dewey, 1938/1986). On the other hand, the sedimentation of this data into dogma was more a
result of the social institutions that gathered around the common-sense view (such as the Church)

In scientific inquiry, the data are substantially worked on in that they define the problem in
such a way that a possible solution can emerge. Furthermore, not only must the facts be molded to
guide the inquirers into an adequate solution, but they should simultaneously function to test the
resulting proposed solution:

The progress made by inquiry in any branch may, then, be measured by the extent
to which it has succeeded in developing methods of inquiry that, at one and the
same time, provide material data having conjunct inferential and testing force.
Satisfaction of this condition provides the definition of inductive procedures.
(Dewey, 1938/1986, 424)

The requirement that the data not only serve as evidential signs for the determination of the nature
of the problem but also for testing the solution also means that the data used must form a
constituent part of the solution. The means used to define the problem, in other words, must form
part of the consequences or ends attained and not remain something external to the end or to the
solution. There is in such a case an internal relation of means to ends and not an external relation.
The double requirement of both specifying the problem and testing the solution is not present in
common-sense inquiry. The data in common-sense inquiry are prepared only to the point necessary
to achieve the specific aims of the person at a particular time and place.

The definition of a problem (increasing clarification of its nature, or the necessary elements
of the problem) is simultaneously the emergence of the explicit formulation of its solution since
they are one and the same process. Scientific inquiry couples analysis and synthesis to a much
greater degree by requiring that the analytic or inductive data must enable the enquirer to develop
a larger whole by pointing the enquirer in a certain direction; the data already contain, implicitly,
a telos or an end in view of clarifying and unifying diverse phenomena—to form a clarified system.

Dewey’s conception of scientific inquiry, then, involves a substantial reworking of the data
of common sense if the data are to serve a scientific inferential function. Scientific inquiry is thus
a complex process that cannot be resolved into a merely more organized form of common sense.
It is a process that has had to overcome the biases characteristic of humans as living and social
beings.

Freire, by contrast, has a less complex conception of the nature of scientific inquiry,
undoubtedly because his agenda was, in the first instance, to have the participants come to realize
that they were subjects of their own lives, whereas in a capitalist society they are treated like
objects. Scientific inquiry, accordingly, must link to the oppressive and exploitative experiences
of the participants while contextualizing them by organizing that experience:

In a long conversation with Malraux, Mao Tse-Tung declared, “You know I’ve
proclaimed for a long time: we must teach the masses clearly what we have received from them confusedly.” André Malraux, Anti-Memoirs (New York, 1968), pp. 361-362. This affirmation contains an entire dialogical theory of how to construct the program content of education, which cannot be elaborated according to what the educator thinks best for the students. (Freire, 1993, 74)

Scientific inquiry, which contextualizes the process of learning, involves merely the reorganization of the inchoate and contradictory understandings of the oppressed into a coherent and clarified form:

What is implied is not the transmission to the people of a knowledge previously elaborated, a process that ignores what they already know, but the act of returning to them, in an organized form, what they have themselves offered in a disorganized form. (Freire, 1978, 24)

Scientific inquiry has its point of departure in the world of daily life. In the world of daily life, human beings could be said to develop immediate knowledge of objects and of their situation, but they do not develop an understanding of the source, cause or raison d'etre of what is experienced:

In this spontaneous way in which we move in the world, we perceive things and facts, we feel ourselves warned, we behave in one way or another because of signs whose meaning we internalize. We gain from them an immediate knowledge, but we don’t learn from them the fundamental reason for being. (1998a, 92)

The cultural totality is implicit in the daily experiences of people, but it needs to be made explicit through the contextualization of those experiences. Scientific inquiry results in the grasping of the cultural totality through such contextualization.

That cultural totality is a totality full of contradictions, and the primary contradiction that Freire emphasizes in his pedagogy of the oppressed is the contradiction between humans as subjects of their own lives, with a past, a present and a future—persons or subjects as beings of time—and their treatment as objects, or beings without time or at best people reduced to the pure present, like animals. The cultural world involves the temporalization of the world, or its transformation into a being there and then, whether in the past or in the future: “For animals, ‘here’ is only a habitat with which they enter into contact; for people, ‘here’ signifies not merely a physical space, but also an historical space” (Freire, 1993, 80). Unlike animals, human beings are open to the world because they temporalize spatial relations. There is a here that is united with a there for human beings, Freire implies, because humans can unite the here and the there through temporal connections of present, past and future: “They [human beings] add to it [the world] something of their own making, by giving temporal meaning to geographic space, by creating culture” (1973, 5).

Scientific inquiry specifies the limit situations which people face that prevent them from becoming the subjects of their own lives—that is what a limit situation is. Just like Dewey, for Freire scientific inquiry is instrumental—a means towards the overcoming of limit situations in this instance. Indeed, Freire’s conception of conscientization captures both the aspect of the determination of conditions which limit subjects of their own lives and the overcoming of those limits; it is a concept that includes both what Eric Kahler called discernment and transcendence as the characteristic of human nature (Harris, 2011). Inquiry or discernment ultimately is to function as a means towards human ends of transcending or going beyond or overcoming their limit situations as subjects of their own lives.

When compared to Dewey’s theory of scientific inquiry, though, there is a problem with Freire’s views on scientific inquiry. Freire fails to specify how anyone knows whether a person
has engaged in scientific inquiry as distinct from common-sense inquiry. Scientific inquiry is organized in a different form from common sense, but not all organized forms of common sense constitute, for Freire, scientific inquiry, since he distinguishes between prise de conscience and conscientization: the former merely grasps isolated facts (however accurately) but does not contextualize them in the cultural totality: “If the prise de conscience goes beyond the mere apprehension of the presence of a fact, and places it critically in the system of relationships within the totality in which it exists, it transcends itself, deepens, and becomes conscientization” (Freire, 1973, 148). However, Freire provides no criteria for determining whether we have developed our inquiry to the point where we can grasp the cultural totality.

Dewey's conception of scientific inquiry, by contrast, requires that data be substantially reorganized in order to perform the function of specifying the problem in such a way that a person can develop a proposed solution and test that solution. Indeed, if the cultural totality is to be determined scientifically, according to Dewey’s criterion, then in the process of education the experiences of the participants would have to undergo substantial and at times complex changes since their initial experiences would not form the data or inductive starting point for such an inquiry.

This difference in their concepts of scientific inquiry plays itself out in their practical concerns. For Dewey, the educators would then need to be much more qualified than in the case of Freire. Indeed, in the Dewey School, although a generalist in education first taught the children, it was found that a generalist could not teach accurately all subjects (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936/1966; Tanner, 1997). As a consequence, teachers who were specialists in given subjects were hired. It would be virtually impossible for a generalist to develop children’s responses into a more concrete form in all subjects, with the result that children would develop vague ideas in various domains:

Many of our early failures were due to the fact that it was too ‘practical,’ too much given to matters of immediate import and not sufficiently intellectual in content. …

It is the absence of cooperative intellectual relations among teachers that causes the present belief that young children must be taught everything by one teacher, and that leads to so-called departmental teaching being strictly compartmental with older ones. (Dewey, quoted in Mayhew and Edwards, 1936/1966, 371-372)

Correlation or integration of subjects arose in part through the cooperative efforts of teachers (through weekly meetings) and in part through the curriculum.

Freire, on the other hand, points out the dangers of having experts teach in the context of oppression and exploitation. The teacher must be capable of developing an attitude of treating people as people or subjects rather than as things. This aspect is much more difficult than the methods of teaching:

A major problem in setting up the program is instructing the teams of coordinators. Teaching the purely technical aspect of the procedure is not difficult; the difficulty lies rather in the creation of a new attitude—that of dialogue, so absent in our own upbringing and education. The coordinators must be converted to dialogue in order to carry our education rather than domestication. (Freire, 1973, 52)

Since the function of treating especially the oppressed as subjects is so difficult for the middle class, it is preferable that the educators come from the oppressed themselves rather than from other classes:

In the last analysis, I am convinced that it is easier to create a new type of intellectual—forged in the unity between practice and theory, manual and
intellectual work—than to reeducate an elitist intellectual. When I say it is easier, I
do not discount the validity of such reeducation when it does occur. (Freire, 1978,
104)
The teacher must therefore be sensitive to acts of oppression vis-à-vis her specific students.

Dewey did not address this problem in his educational philosophy or practice. On the other
hand, Freire’s characterization of scientific inquiry as merely an organized form of common-sense
experience fails to provide criteria for determining the adequacy of an inquirer’s efforts. Both lack
something which the other has to offer. It would seem that a synthesis or combination of their
philosophies would offer the best opportunity for creating a more adequate form of popular
education. However, before such a judgement can be made, it is necessary to look at their
philosophies concerning capitalist relations since those relations form the life context within which
popular education is to function. As will be seen, both criticize capitalist relations in an external
manner.

Dewey's and Freire's External Critique of Capitalism

Dewey largely bases his critique of capitalist relations on his conception of the nature of a
community. He considers a community to exist where a common interest is both shared
consciously and used to control one's behaviour. Thus, a community is a community if its members
are conscious of their being members of a community and use that knowledge to affect their
behaviour: "The planets in a constellation would form a community if they were aware of the
connections of the activities of each with those of the others and could use this knowledge to direct
behaviour" (1927/1954, 25). Becoming conscious of one's associations creates the possibility of a
shared interest; associations between human beings can then be transformed into a community
because the individuals alter their behaviour and change those associations in light of the changed
consciousness. Insofar as cooperation is not achieved consciously, there is no community. In
contemporary society, though, a principal social problem has been the breakdown in community
relations, on the one hand, and the lack of emergence of a reconstructed community on the other.

Dewey's explanation for a lack of community is twofold: technological and cultural. The
breakdown in community occurs because of the contradiction between the requirements of modern
technology and science, and old habits handed down from a pre-industrial era. Modern technology
has disintegrated the old forms of face-to-face community, but social relations between individuals
have not caught up to the technological forms. There is a cultural lag based on pre-scientific, pre-
technological feudal relations so that attitudes remain resistant despite changed circumstances:

When a certain state of accumulated knowledge, of techniques and
instrumentalities is attained, the process of change is so accelerated, that, as to-day,
it appears externally to be the dominant trait. But there is a marked lag in any
corresponding change of ideas and desires. (Dewey, 1927/1954, 162)

Lagged habits are not new habits but rather old ones that derive from the feudal epoch:
"The fact is that the opposition of high worth of personality to social efficiency is a product of a
feudally organized society with its rigid division of inferior and superior" (Dewey, 1916/1980,
128). Even commercial relations (and, by implication, the pursuit of profit) are anachronistic:

There are even some who regard the materialism and dominance of commercialism
of modern life as fruits of undue devotion to physical science, not seeing that the
split between man and nature, artificially made by a tradition which originated
before there was understanding of the physical conditions that are the medium of
human activities, is the benumbing factor. (Dewey, 1927/1954, 173-174)
This identification of modern social relations with feudal relations (rather than relations dominated by employers and the contractual market system) is not an isolated theme in Dewey's writings:

But the simple fact is that technological industry has not operated with any great degree of freedom. It has been confined and deflected at every point; it has never taken its own course. The engineer has worked in subordination to the business manager whose primary concern is not with wealth but with the interests of property as worked out in the feudal and semi-feudal period. (1927/1954, 108)

Dewey thus considers capitalist relations to be a throwback to feudalism; they represent a cultural lag. Past attitudes still linger on in the present, and this cultural lag constitutes a basis for his critique of modern capitalism—an external critique. Dewey certainly does seem to criticize capitalism in a number of his works, but his characterization of capitalist relations as a throwback to feudal relations does not provide a characterization of capitalist relations on its own terms.

Dewey therefore treats the non-correspondence between technology and social relations in external terms; technology does not in any way relate to social relations except in terms of a cultural lag. Social relations, rooted in the past, need to change to correspond to modern technological conditions, rooted in the present and with a dynamic leading to an accelerated future. In effect, Dewey takes no cognizance of capital as a specific social relation. There are no inductive units of analysis in his critique of capitalism. Dewey's criticism of capitalist relations is not framed in terms of his own understanding of the nature of scientific induction. Rather, it is based on his conception of community and its dissolution with the coming of industrialization. As Barbalet (1983) points out, such a concept of community is normative. It can be critical because it measures something by what it lacks. Feinberg (1969) also implies that Dewey uses a normative concept of community to criticize society. Brosio (1972) concurs with Feinberg.

According to Dewey's own criterion of scientific inquiry, if his criticism of capitalism were scientific, it would involve the emergence of inductive data that would have synthetic qualities permitting the inquirer to formulate an hypothesis in such a way as to point toward a solution and to test that solution. In other words, scientific data have both analytic and potentially synthetic qualities. There is no evidence that Dewey provided any such data in his criticism of capitalist relations.

Dewey did, however, criticize capitalist relations—but his criticism is not in terms of his own theory of the nature of scientific inquiry. Rather, it is grounded in his theory of a cultural lag—a normative criterion and, according to his own theory of the logic of scientific inquiry, deficient.

Freire also has a theory of cultural lag (1973), but this view does not form the ground for his criticism of capitalism. Freire criticizes capitalist relations in terms of his general characterization of what it is to be a human being or subject. Capitalism systematically results in the treatment of human beings as objects and thus contradicts its own premise of the human world as a world of time, which includes not only the objective past in the present (in the form, for example, of technology) but also the moment of subjectivity, or the future in the present, the moment of transcendence of the limit situations in the present by people as they engage their world as subjects of their own lives, directing their lives in such a way that they produce a further objective world that provides a better environment for people to engage with the world as subjects of their own lives: education as the practice of freedom. Since human beings, by their very nature, refer to those past conditions in their specific context which limit them in order to overcome those conditions in the present and thereby create a new future—what Freire calls humans’ ontological vocation of becoming more—those limit situations that deny their historicity are necessarily oppressive conditions and need to be overcome. Capitalist relations are merely the modern form
of generally dehumanizing conditions which limit human beings:

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human. This distortion occurs within history, but it is not an historical vocation. Indeed, to admit of dehumanization as an historical vocation would lead either to cynicism or total despair. (Freire, 1993, 26)

The ontological vocation of being human is a necessary condition for dehumanization even to occur (you cannot reduce a person to one or two dimensions of time unless they are by nature three-dimensional beings of time in the first place), but dehumanization is not a necessary condition for the ontological vocation of being human to occur.

Capitalist dehumanization is a continuation of other forms of dehumanization that deny the nature of being human: the capacity to determine the limit situations emerging from the past and the capacity to choose the path that seems most likely to eliminate those limit situations. Capitalist relations contradict the ontological vocation of becoming more and therefore need to be criticized, and that criticism is fundamentally moral or normative:

That's when I was helped by some of the things I learned from Marxism about analysis and about the practical use of the whole business of conflict, how you deal with the dichotomies or seeming dichotomies. That was an act of trying to learn how to analyze society. I started trying to learn about society so I could make a moral judgment, a rational judgment. That was the basis of finally deciding that I was going to work with poor people, working people. (Horton & Freire, 1990, 102-103)

Capitalist relations, founded on exploitation and oppression, contradict the ontological vocation of becoming more and thus must be criticized. Capitalist relations, since they deny human beings as subjects, are inherently evil:

Its fundamental ideology seeks to mask that what is really up for discussion is the increasing wealth of the few and the rapid increase of poverty and misery for the vast majority of humanity. The capitalist system reaches, in its globalizing neoliberal crusade, the maximum efficacy of its intrinsically evil nature. (Pedagogy of Freedom, 1998b, 114)

Freire’s criticism of capitalist relations is essentially moral or ethical: “… it [a dialogue between a leftist party and the popular classes] must be hopeful, critically optimistic, and ‘drenched’ in ethics” (1997, 78). Freire’s normative point of view permits him to criticize capitalist relations, but it also leads to serious theoretical and practical problems. His view excludes the historical development of human beings by means of exploitation; his view must thus exclude a large part of how human beings have in fact developed. For instance, slaves formed the basis for the intellectual flowering in ancient Greece, and were the most lucrative form of labour in the later Roman republic (Anderson, 1974). For Freire, though, historical facts and the whole history of exploitation must be seen as one long mistake.

Furthermore, on the basis of Freire’s theory, socialism, or the abolition of class relations, could arise on the basis of feudal relations. Indeed, Freire implies that the abolition of exploitation—a classless society—can emerge within the national framework of Guinea-Bissau:

It is because the people are so deeply rooted in this security and humility that one perceives the firm commitment of both the people and their leaders to make concrete the dream that they have pursued since the beginning of the struggle—to reinvent their society, banishing the exploitation of some by others, and overcoming
injustices. (1978, 35)
If the abolition of classes is a solution to the problems set by capitalist society, and the problems are international in character, it is difficult to understand how a particular country can resolve such problems. Nonetheless, Freire accepts, without question, the idea that a socialist society can emerge within a particular nation. Indeed, in a thoroughly idealist manner he assumes that even small countries can usher in a socialist society. This reflects the view of socialism in one country espoused since the failure of the Russian revolution in 1917 to galvanize other countries to revolution.

Basing his theory in part on the recognition of the systematic existence of exploitation, and yet lacking in general a model of history that incorporates the empirical fact of exploitation and oppression as forming part of the conditions for human freedom, Freire tends to make leaps of faith from oppression and exploitation to their complete abolition without any specification of the conditions necessary for their abolition. There is too little mediation process in his theory and practice. The complexity of understanding the capitalist world requires more rigorous inquiry, a rigour reflected in Dewey’s view of the nature of scientific inquiry.

Although Dewey does see the need, theoretically, for a rigorous conception of the process of scientific inquiry he, like Freire, generally excludes systematic exploitation as an historical condition for human progress. In the Dewey School, for example, the drive for progress was in large part purely technical; progress was purely a question of developing the correct technical solution to problems the collective faced in relation to nature: "Further, it was only through the invention of devices which made for better living conditions, more efficient weapons for defense and the getting of food, that man had come to a more settled and secure way of living" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936/1966, 117-118). As Karier and Hogan (1979) argue, the School did not systematically teach how technology was used in harmful ways as a weapon against workers during the capitalist industrial revolution. What children learned in history, both theoretically and practically, was the positive aspect of the use of technology, but the voice of the workers, who suffered and suffer from its use capitalistically, needs to be heard.

So too does the voice of different classes of workers throughout history. Not only was capitalism as a specific set of contradictory relations not included in the curriculum, but the exploitation of workers throughout history was generally excluded. The development of the capacities of some individuals at the expense of others did not form part of the curriculum. The presentation of the origin of slavery likewise painted over the suffering of some associated with it and the simultaneous development of others on its basis.

Dewey’s own views on the nature of scientific inquiry, however, point to a solution to the problem, initially in relation to the understanding of the nature of capitalist relations. What is needed is an inductive starting point that can lead students to grasp the nature of those relations, their contradictions (social relations that have opposing principles) and a solution to those contradictions. Marx’s analysis of capitalist relations, starting with the inductive unit the commodity, leads to such an understanding. The commodity is the analytic unit that includes a synthetic aspect. Analysis goes hand in hand with synthesis, and synthesis goes hand in hand with analysis (Dewey, 1933; Janoska, Bondeli, Kindle, Hofer, 1994).

Marx’s Internal Critique of Capitalist Relations of Production and Exchange
Marx begins Capital with the commodity. The commodity is a unity of two opposite properties: use value (such as beer) produced by concrete labour, and value (produced by abstract labour). Concrete labour produces use value and abstract labour produces value—at the same time.
Concrete labour is definite and is differentiated from other forms of labour, such as the concrete labour that produces beer and the labour that produces coffee. It is that aspect of the labour process which links humans to the rest of the natural world and contributes to the reproduction of their lives materially in general. By contrast, abstract labour is indefinite and can assume any form of labour, and its product can also assume any form.

The nature of abstract labour has various aspects to it. This difficult concept can be grasped initially in terms of production and in terms of exchange. Abstract labour is labour in production that does not satisfy the immediate needs of the direct workers nor the ruling class; production is thereby freed from personal constraints and can develop independently of the personal needs of both the working class and the capitalist class. For example, when I first worked at a brewery in Calgary in 1979, we could produce a maximum of 550 bottles of beer per minute; when I quit in 1983, we could produce a maximum of 1,400 bottles per minute with perhaps a third increase in the labour force. The result of abstract labour is value.

On a more colloquial note, abstract labour involves the reduction of workers to mere blobs of labour time; only the labour time of the workers is what matters during capitalist production and not the specific kind of object or service. In office settings, in fast food places, in warehouses and so forth, the conditions are less controlled, but employers attempt to develop processes that capture the maximum amount of labour in the shortest possible time.

However, abstract labour is, initially, linked to a definite form of labour and so too is its product. In order for value to function as value, it must abstract from the use value to which it is connected and be realized in a form in which it is freely convertible into any other form—money. The value of beer, cannot function as value while it is tied to the use value, the value of the beer, along with the rest of production that is not directly linked to the needs of the producers (and those of the ruling class), is expressed in money. Money as a solution to the problem of the commodity possessing two opposite properties (one definite, the other indefinite) results in the separation, in space and time, of the complete exchange of a commodity, or the realization of the two properties of the commodity—the value of the commodity and its use value. The value of the commodity is realized in the form of money, and the money is then spent on diverse use values at different points of time (and often in different places). Already there arises the possibility of economic crises because of this split in time and space of what is fundamentally a unity (social labour and labour of a definite kind). The possibility for crisis becomes more concrete and more probable as the nature of capital, grounded in the commodity and the twofold character of labour that produces it, develops.

The quantity of material output produced by concrete labour varies according to the level of productivity, and productivity is a function of many determinants or conditions. Concrete wealth or use value has many determinants, not just one:

This [the productivity of labour] is determined by a wide range of circumstances; it is determined amongst other things by the workers’ average degree of skill, the level of development of science and its technological application, the social organization of the process of production, the extent and effectiveness of the means of production, and the conditions found in the natural environment. (Marx, 1867/1976, 130)

The usefulness of a commodity or the material aspect of the commodity is independent of the quantity of labour required to appropriate it:

But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical
properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter; it is therefore the physical body of the commodity itself, for instance iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use-value or useful thing. This property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities. (Marx, 1867/1976, 130)

Abstract labour, on the other hand, is the only determinant of value: “Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects” (Marx, 1867/1976, 138). Only human labour produces value. There is only one determinant: “But the value of a commodity represents human labour pure and simple, the expenditure of human labour in general” (Marx, 1867/1976, 135).

The relation between concrete and abstract labour is contradictory:

In itself, an increase in the quantity of use-values constitutes an increase in material wealth. Two coats will clothe two men, one coat will only clothe one man, etc. Nevertheless, an increase in the amount of material wealth may correspond to a simultaneous fall in the magnitude of its value. This contradictory movement arises out of the twofold character of labour. (Marx, 1867/1976, 136-137)

Labour is exclusively the basis for capitalist wealth, but it is tied to concrete labour as the basis for material wealth, or wealth that pertains to the material reproduction of the human life process, and the production of that wealth is tied to many determinants.

With the increasing development of machinery, the world of the production of human life actually depends less and less on human labour and more and more on other aspects of the material production process. As Marx develops his analysis of capital from the inductive starting point of the twofold nature of the commodity and the twofold character of the capitalist production process, his critique of capital becomes an internal (immanent) critique because it demonstrates that, as capital develops on the basis of the commodity and the dialectical contradictory principle of concrete and abstract labour, abstract labour as a measure of wealth becomes more and more anachronistic. Revolutions in technology and the development and application of science are means to the end of obtaining surplus value, but the means used contradict the end sought since the source of surplus value becomes less and less a material aspect of the production of human life and its relations (Vadee, 1998).

Revolutions in machine technology in a capitalist economy arise not from some internal principle of science (they would do so in a socialist economy). Rather, they arise because one capitalist hopes to outcompete other capitalists by producing commodities at less than their social value, thereby gaining an advantage over other capitalists in the same industry and permitting the individual capitalist to appropriate excess surplus labour over the norm. The introduction and development of machinery, then, in capitalist conditions, expresses the increased independence and dominance of objectified labour over living labour—the increased dominance of the past (represented by the produced machines, buildings and so forth as well as by the person of the capitalist or corporation) over the present (represented by the workers). At the same time, these internal revolutions undermine the social basis for the rule of capital since the social basis is exclusively labour time. Human life, materially, depends less and less on labour, but the social basis for the capitalist process of production and exchange still persists. Economic crises become increasingly probable as commodities are produced that cannot be sold or converted into the general form of capitalist wealth—money.

The inductive unit of the commodity therefore foreshadows the solution to the problem of
two different and opposing standards of the human life process. That solution is socialism, where the social human life process would no longer be based only on labour but would be based on the technological and scientific ground of preceding generations. The natural basis of the human life process and the social basis of that process would no longer be at loggerheads. Unlike Dewey’s theory of cultural lag, where such a lag is explicit from the beginning, the lag between value production and material production, though implicit in undeveloped capitalist forms, becomes explicit as capitalist relations develop. Unlike Dewey’s and Freire’s external critiques of capitalism, therefore, Marx’s ground for socialism is found in the development of capitalism itself—in the dual nature of the commodity and the dual nature of human labour.

However, although Marx’s internal ground for his critique of capitalist relations, theoretically, is closer to Dewey’s theory of inquiry than that of Freire, politically it shares some of the traits of Freire’s concerns. Freire’s acute awareness of the alienating aspects of capitalist relations (unlike many intellectuals) does provide a needed counterweight to Dewey’s form of popular education. Specifically, his attitude towards capitalism, although essentially moral, has an advantage over Dewey’s approach.

Freire is conscious of the need to address the fears of the working class due to their exploitation and oppression: “The dominated consciousness is dual, ambiguous, full of fear and mistrust” (1993, 147). Such consciousness is generally absent from Dewey’s work. That such a fear is well founded can be seen when considering the viciousness of the ruling class in, for example, Guatemala (Lovell, 2010). In the more developed capitalist economies, fear assumes a different form—fear of losing one’s job and becoming destitute for example. Geoffrey Kay (1979) has realistically assessed what members of the working class face should they lose their jobs: destitution within a matter of months as they deplete their savings or sell their house. Then there is fear of subtle (or not so subtle) reprisal by management should workers challenge their authority.

Another—and related—areal of Freire’s focus which Dewey does not address in any depth is the denigration of working-class experience. Dewey, through his theory of occupations, it is true, provides a foundation for developing a curriculum and pedagogy that would serve the working class well (Harris, 2014). He also recognizes that members of the working class are often treated with disdain by their so-called superiors. However, he does not directly address the issue, whereas Freire does. This denigration can even assume the form of the internalization of the oppressors’ image and is certainly a characteristic of some members of the working class, who see themselves as deserving the limited opportunities that they experience in life.

Freire addresses more explicitly a gap in Dewey’s approach to education—a gap that simply ignores the fear and circumstances of the working class—as if the working class did not exist and the class struggle were something to be avoided. No one could imagine a poetic Dewey writing the following—but one could imagine a poetic Freire doing so:

_Apolitical intellectuals_
One day
the apolitical
intellectuals
of my country
will be interrogated
by the simplest
of our people.
They will be asked
what they did
when their nation died out
slowly,
like a sweet fire
small and alone.
No one will ask them
about their dress,
their long siestas
after lunch,
no one will want to know
about their sterile combats
with "the idea
of the nothing"
no one will care about
their higher financial learning.
They won't be questioned
on Greek mythology,
or regarding their self-disgust
when someone within them
begins to die
the coward's death.
They'll be asked nothing
about their absurd
justifications,
born in the shadow
of the total lie.
On that day
the simple men will come.
Those who had no place
in the books and poems
of the apolitical intellectuals,
but daily delivered
their bread and milk,
their tortillas and eggs,
those who drove their cars,
who cared for their dogs and gardens
and worked for them,
and they'll ask:
"What did you do when the poor
suffered, when tenderness
and life
burned out of them?"
Apolitical intellectuals
of my sweet country,
you will not be able to answer.
A vulture of silence
will eat your gut.
Your own misery
will pick at your soul.
And you will be mute in your shame. (Castillo, n.d.)

Freire's focus on oppressive conditions reveals, in fact, another element of reality that Dewey does not address directly: the so-called neutrality of inquiry. Inquiry in the context of capitalist relations has increasingly been used to oppress workers in various ways. Examples of the bias of inquiry in a capitalist context can easily be found. One of the most obvious is neoclassical economics—which dominates economic inquiry and teaching at universities. Neoclassical economics by definition excludes class relation since it uses the category of households and consumers to homogenize class differences (Weeks, 2012). Freire's approach from the start directs the researcher to at least question such so-called objective research due to its possible ideological and oppressive character.

Popular education in a capitalist context, then, needs to combine insights from Marx, Dewey and Freire. Such insights include the need to develop a curriculum that permits participants to move to a more scientific view of capitalist relations through a reworked inductive approach suggested by both Marx and Dewey. At the same time, Freire’s insights concerning fear, denigration of working-class experience and the ideological nature of the claim that social inquiry is neutral in a capitalist context need to be included in a curriculum dedicated to popular education. Popular education needs to become more rigorous without being academic.

Notes

1 A skills and employment survey in Britain (Gallie, Feldstead, Green, & Inanc, 2013) found that workers' feared job loss, unfair treatment and loss of job status; available historical statistics for the first two categories show that such fears have increased.
2 I had been substitute teaching for a number of years, and I was coming to the end of my doctorate (which I finished in 2009), so I needed to obtain a permanent position. I obtained a permanent teaching position in September, 2008, but I had to pass my probationary period before receiving my permanence. Near the end of December, 2008, I started feeling very sick, but I hid that fact from the employer because I wanted to receive my permanence. In March 2009, I was diagnosed with invasive bladder cancer, and in June the prognosis was 60 percent chance of dying in the next five years. Fear of pauperism motivates many members of the working class to jeopardize their own health.
3 In 2014, in a course on developing working-class capacities among teachers (of which I played only a minor part since I only took notes of what I observed), some teachers expressed the idea that many teachers feared retaliation by principals if they tried to oppose them in any way. In December 2015, in two separate courses with airport workers which two other workers and I facilitated, the issue of fear of retaliation by management was clearly of concern for the participants in the courses.
4 While engaged in my practicum to obtain a library and information technology diploma at the University of Calgary library around 1989, one library worker there commented that she would prefer to have a benevolent dictator as a boss—in comparison with a mean boss. The possibility of having an elected boss did not occur to her as a serious possibility.
5 Rene Castillo, one of Guatemala’s greatest poets, decided to fight with Guatemalan guerrillas against the Guatemalan army 1967; he was captured, tortured for four days and burned alive.

References

Harris, F. (2007). Dewey’s concepts of stability and precariousness in his philosophy of


