



Rancière aimed to achieve a double aim: on the positive side, to demonstrate the capacity of the dominated to use the resources of logos, their ability to articulate their own thoughts and feelings on the basis of their specific experiences; on the negative side, to unveil the boundaries and divisions that are projected from the social into the intellectual realms, and that prevent the dominated from having their discourses count as meaningful and significant.

Rancière's key concepts – seem bound to betray the author and his ideas by the very nature of our explanatory gesture.

The main assertion repeated in this remarkably subtle praise of equality is that the most perverse form of oppression and subjection is located in the very act of explaining. Most of us tend to take for granted that giving explanations – and what is teaching but "giving explanations" – is a noble act of generosity and emancipation through which the explainer raises the explainee to a higher level of knowledge and understanding.

Rancière is ultimately able to show us that, in political philosophy, what always had to be defended, in the most different times and places, was the position of the philosopher himself, as bearer of a knowledge inaccessible to people outside specific pedagogical situations. For Rancière, this presupposed inaccessibility is not only a conceptual blind spot but also a historical fallacy.

Rancière shows us how, time and again, even extremely different philosophers tend to assume similar postures when faced with the independence of equal human beings claiming the same ability to reason as his or her own.

In the *'Ignorant School Master'*, Ranciere wishes to revisit certain principles on which the modern education system stands. To do this he tells the story of Joseph Jactot, a teacher who was given the job of teaching Flemish students, the trouble was that he himself did not know any Flemish and the Flemish students did not know French. What emerges is an interesting philosophical experiment that is hinged on the fact that humans can spontaneously learn a new language if they pay attention to it and this can be done without any explication.

This experiment for Ranciere can potentially change the way we look at teaching as a profession. 'Equality' in its most radical shape and form is at the heart of this change. In fact, in his thesis 'equality' is also at the heart of the dead lock that teaching as a profession is facing. The deadlock for Ranciere is created by this very assumption of an informed teacher that has a claim on knowledge against the uninformed ignorant student.

The title *'The Ignorant School Master'* stems from the displacement of this professional. The word 'Ignorant' here is put to argue against the hierarchy of intelligences that are considered necessary in modern classrooms, in contrast to that this book argues for a certain equality of intelligences between the student and teacher that the word 'Ignorant' grasps.

Jactot was a progressive teacher and understood that teaching is not about cramming, but what Jactot found from this experiment were not arguments for this progressive form of the teacher as Ranciere points out to us, Jactot's observations completely displaces the modern idea of the teacher itself for Ranciere:

".....he knew that teaching was not in the slightest about cramming students with knowledge.....but he knew equally well that students had to avoid the chance detours where minds still incapable from distinguishing the essential from the accessory....In short, the essential act of the master was to explicate....." (p, 3)

It is in this way Ranciere is not just questioning inequalities such as caste, class, gender etc that exist, but he is taking all these debates back to the very asymmetry between the teacher and the student that has to be assumed for classrooms to function at the center of which is the model of explication.

It may seem that this asymmetry is a necessary aspect of a teacher-student relationship but not according to Ranciere; according to him there is a circular logic at the heart of sanctioning of this asymmetry. Ranciere points out, that if a student is given a book to understand a series of reasonings, and then a teacher who explicates is just another series of reasonings to explain the book. Then what can the teacher tell that the book fails to do, and if the book fails then why not have another teacher to explain the last teacher. In other words can't we have another level of explicative process, another teacher maybe to explain this last system of reasons, thereby making this process infinite? This for Ranciere leads to a logical fallacy, a loop that can only be stopped by making a teacher the sole judge of where it has to stop:

"So the logic of explication calls for the principle of regression ad infinitum: there is no reason for the redoubling of reasonings ever to stop. What brings an end to the regression and gives the system its foundation is simply that the explicator is the sole judge of the point when the explication is itself explicated." (p, 4)

In fact, Ranciere is conscious of the fact that things in nature are never completely equal. He creates a distinction between 'will' and 'intelligence'. He agrees that there is a need for a hierarchy of 'will' to be there, it is the hierarchy of intelligence that he points where the problem lies. The role of teacher still remains, it just shifts from verifying whether the student has learnt to whether or not the student has paid attention:

"He will not verify what the student has found; he will verify that the student has searched. He will judge whether or not he has paid attention." (p, 31)

This shift for Ranciere from taking equality as a goal to a presupposition is only possible because there is something about intelligence itself that calls for this equality. Ranciere points out many times that it is a fact that people learn things all the time without feeling the need for others explicate things to them. This for Ranciere wouldn't have been possible if there wasn't anything about intelligence that could create certain conditions for equality. When two people understand each-other it is exactly this equality that Ranciere sees:

"Intelligence is not a power of understanding based on comparing knowledge with its object. It is the power to make oneself understood through another's verification. And only equal understands an equal. Equality and intelligence are synonymous terms, exactly like reason and will." (p, 73)

It is in this way Ranciere is not only articulating a new teaching model but is also shifting the way society recognizes a teacher and his profession. This also paves the way for Ranciere's conversations with thinkers like

Bourdieu who critique the notion of equality and dismiss it as a cruel thing in itself; Ranciere's distinction between 'equality' as a presupposition and a goal come in handy for him to articulate a counter-critique, where he argues that all notions of equality also cannot be just left out and dismissed.

. Ranciere is pointing at a problem with the claim that- 'there are two levels of intelligence, one that is used for academic work where reason is used, and the other which the common man uses for his daily activities'- this for him is a false claim. It is here he is talking to sociologists directly:

"....there are not two levels of intelligence that any human work of art is the practice of the same intellectual potential.....He who makes a distinction between the manual work of the worker or the common man and clouds of rhetoric remains stultified." (p, 36, 37)

In the whole third chapter Ranciere builds upon establishing this relationship between formal learning and child learning language and even other tasks from his environment are linked to this. This is radically different from how sociologists like Bourdieu analyzed schooling through the lens of cultural capital. Kristin Ross in his introduction to *The Ignorant School Master* writes while developing a Ranciere's critique of Bourdieu:

The working class youth are excluded from the university because they are unaware of the true reasons for which they are excluded. Their ignorance of the true reasons for which they are excluded is a structural effect produced by the very existence of the system that excludes them (*La Reproduction*)

For Ranciere, there is a tautology at the heart of this analysis that is just broken by the Sociologist himself, who can reveal the underlying oppressive structures. In contrast to this Ranciere's proposal is that this stultification of the masses happens by the very nature of the logic used by the sociologist himself, where his analysis is put on a pedestal over the lives of the masses. In contrast to this, Ranciere's claim is that emancipation cannot take place by making structural reforms in a manner that system becomes equal for everybody. This for Ranciere would be to use equality as a goal and will never work. Instead Ranciere's proposal is to make equality a starting point of the discussion itself, a presupposition through which all other inequalities can be negotiated and engaged with. This can be done when learning is targeted at individuals rather than societies as a whole: "Universal teaching can only be directed to individual never to societies" (p, 105)

The shift in the discussion in the teaching community that such a book is seeking is that teaching should not be about whether a student has learnt or not but whether he has paid attention or not. What he gets from his attention can be completely up to him/her.

The Ignorant School Master is a ground-breaking work that I feel is will more gain more and more readership as the time goes on. The question it is addressing is that of 'emancipation', 'equality' and 'democracy' in education and how these keep on becoming more important as time passes.. Inequalities that education produces are no longer just thought of linked to the society that education system is a part of but also seen to be the function of education system itself. In this context works like these are very important to be read and engaged with so that new ways to think about these problems can be found.

However, Ranciere's exploration of education does not account for certain issues that may make it seem that this book is far away from the ground realities. For instance, the argument for not judging students on what they have learnt doesn't practically stem from just stopping this explication process but from a social need to use education as a structuring force that guides citizenship. Thus, no matter how we see it, education does have a social function, even if it contradicts the ethos of the universal teaching as Ranciere points out. Education in modernity cannot be only conceptualized as a tool for individual emancipation; it is also a tool of social control. This clash between the 'individual' and 'collective' no longer can just be dismissed as external to the teaching learning process in modernity. In the same manner to articulate the role of teacher with 'ignorance' that means subject knowledge to now play a role in the teaching process at all needs to be relooked and better understood.

Rancière's argument in support of Jacotot's conclusions is easy to follow and quite convincing; the book also does well is recasting the basic premises of Jacotot's system in the basic terminology of twentieth-century theory. Language, for example, plays an important role in the entire argument because Jacotot concluded that intelligence was prior to, and corrupted by, language: we are not intelligent because of language; rather, language is merely a tool by which we communicate with and understand each other. "Man does not think because he speaks – this would precisely submit thought to the existing material order. Man thinks because he exists" (62). Truth, therefore, cannot be expressed in language but must rather be grasped or felt in spite of its inadequacies.

On the whole, the conclusions of the book are at once hopeful and discouraging. Progress, especially in terms of the

refinement of social institutions to reflect rationality, becomes a negative term because it constitutively perpetuates the very inequalities that it supposes itself to be overcoming. Equality, therefore, can never be realized on a social level because we need social institutions and they necessarily produce inequality. At the same time, however, the book is hopeful and potentially revolutionary insofar as emancipation is always possible – at least intellectually – because every human being has the capacity to realize his or her capacity for intelligence by submitting his will to rationality. As Rancière says, "There cannot be a class of the emancipated, an assembly or a society of the emancipated."

Going further, Rancière addresses the counter arguments, both those documented in history and those that can be projected by today's skeptics. Throughout the text he dismantles these counter arguments, showing them to be the critiques of those invested in the preservation of inequality. He even goes so far as to reveal the consequences of progressives who would appropriate the tenets of emancipatory education in service of a new order, one which only rearranges the ranks of difference.

From this inspiring premise and the historical instantiation of universal teaching in the early 19th century, Rancière then pits the society of explication and masters against this ideal of equal intelligence. While I have always advocated that anyone can learn who wants to, and that every communication conveys something of intelligible worth and thus is worthy of attention, I am not so sure about the overarching political consequences that Rancière tries to draw. I can accept that there is a conflict when those in power feel their status and influence undermined by an individual self-worth and innovation. But I feel like it is too much to say that the only revolution that is needed is a disruption of all social institutions in favor of individual emancipation into the will to learn. We are still social creatures, and intellectual emancipation is no guarantee of social responsibility; in fact, it seems that those who favor this kind of individual liberty often shun the social while taking advantage of its resources. As a result, I found myself simultaneously intrigued/inspired and frustrated/disappointed.

In terms of a revolutionary perspective the focus on equality of intelligence might seem a little off point to many socialists with so much material deprivation and an increasing gap in our relative wealth. Many people see equality of all sorts as economically determined in the classic Marxist sense. I guess that behind this focus on intelligence is an assumption that all human problems are capable of succumbing to thought. Whether one is faced with overthrowing a dictator or changing an economic system innovative radical thinking is what must precede action. Not the thinking of a genius or two, but more a global uprising of general intelligence.

Jacotot called this method universal teaching. From this experience, he derived a proposition by turns startling and simple: intelligence does not admit of differences of quantity. Everyone is as intelligent as everyone else. Application or access to intelligence is a matter of will. Learning then is an act of will, and the training and strengthening of will. In other words, learning is emancipation, at least when it occurs via universal teaching.

If universal teaching is emancipation, what is other teaching? It is stultification. Ordinary teaching methods are based on explication, which implies an assumption of the inferiority of the student: the student is unable and deficient, and therefore needs the explicator to guide the student through their education, to give them knowledge. A partly remembered quote from Stirner comes to mind – 'having been licked into shape, they in turn lick others into shape', a process which has nothing to do with educating people into liberty and their own power. This education is fundamentally one which inculcates inferiority: starting from the supposition of inferiority, education produces material inferiority in the form of stultification – lack of knowledge of and ability to exercise intelligence.

Pushed far enough, Jacotot's ideas raise questions about whether it makes sense to even say universal teaching is a method: "if you think about it a little, the 'method' he was proposing is the oldest in the world (...) there is no one in the world who hasn't learned something by himself and without an explicator." (16.) That is, universal teaching, to be emancipatory (in the sense of being aware of "the consciousness of that equality" of intelligence in/accessed by all people), must admit that emancipation is always self-emancipation. Otherwise universal teaching becomes yet another stultifying doctrine.

For Rancière, the idea of equality of intelligence which arises out of the experience of universal teaching is not an ontological matter. Rather, it is a supposition. "Let's see what we can do if we assume this to be the case." It is a principle to be continually tested and verified. This point also raises the question of what can be done or is done by the assumption of inequality of intelligence (that is, stultification). The emphasis, then, is on practices.

On the practice of speech:

"Each word is sent off with the intention of carrying just one thought, but, unknown to the one speaking and in spite of him, that speech, that word, that larva, is made fruitful by the listener's will; and the representative of a monad becomes the center of a sphere of ideas radiating out in all directions, such that speaker has actually said an infinity of things beyond what he wanted to say; he has formed a body of an idea with ink, and the matter destined to mysteriously envelop a solitary being actually contains a whole world of those beings, those thoughts." (63.)

Ranciere writes "explication is not only the stultifying weapon of the pedagogues but the very bond of the social order. Whoever says order say distribution into ranks. Putting into ranks presupposes explication, the distributory, justificatory fiction of an inequality that has no other reason for being." (117.)

Stultification plays out in historical narratives:

"The most elementary hierarchy is that of good and evil. The simplest logical relationship that can serve to explain this hierarchy is that of before and after. With these four terms, we have the matrix of all explications. Things were better before, say some (...) Let's try then to preserve or revive that which, in our distinctions, still holds us to the principle of the good. Happiness will come tomorrow, respond the others: the human species was like a child left to the caprices and terrors of his imagination (...) Now, minds are enlightened, customs are civilized, and industry spreads its benefits. (...) Capacity must from now on decide social ranks, and it is education that will reveal and develop it."

Ranciere tells the story Joseph Jacotot, who developed a a new method of teaching. Basically this man goes to Brussels and cannot speak Flemish; however, he is tasked with teaching law to his students who also do not know French (his language). What follows is difficult to process and at times Ranciere is not explicit with what EXACTLY happens. But it is fascinating reading this teacher's account for the mastery and struggle and ultimate success of his students.

Through the work of Jacotot (an ignorant schoolmaster) he introduces us to the concept he calls "universal teaching". The whole practice of teaching is about how to become emancipated, he speaks not only about the emancipation of students but also about the emancipation of masters. Only emancipated master can emancipate his students.

The whole practice of universal teaching is summed up in the question: what do you think about it?" (p.36). Ranciere notes that "Everything is in everything" (p.27) therefore we are all equal in our intelligence, because "there is nothing to understand" (p.23), "one must begin to speak" (p.24). No one understands more, we might just think that they do and we hand over our power of thinking as well as learning the moment we start to worship the master.

The Socratic method is thus a perfected form of stultification. Like all learned masters, Socrates interrogates in order to instruct, But whoever wishes to emancipate someone must interrogate him in the manner of men and not in the manner of scholars, in order to be instructed, not to instruct. And that can only be performed by someone who effectively knows no more than the student, who has never made the voyage before him, the ignorant master."

In reality, the inequality that is perpetuated actually negatively impacts the student. We must remind our students and ourselves that a presumed inequality of intelligence is not only unfair, and morally questionable, but it is also on a more practical level NOT conducive to learning.

Education is coercive, most all the time. This is the astonishing examination that Ranciere opens, and the most useful piece of this book, for me. "Spelling is an act of contrition before being a way of learning," and within hierarchical education, so are all attempts to 'instruct' and 'explain to' another human being.

In the book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Jacques Rancière illustratively shows what teaching and explaining actually mean and who can be taught, who needs to be taught, and what an individual, a group, and ultimately society should learn. Rancière thus stresses the elementary and irreconcilable inconsistency or paradox in the overall structure of education, which has not yet been resolved to date.