

# Understanding Philosophical Orientations of Paulo Freire

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## Abstract

*This paper attempts to understand the theoretical underpinnings and work of Paulo Freire and to study the philosophical foundations of his work. It outlines the influence of Marxist and Christian thoughts on the formulation of his liberatory theory. The paper offers insights into the inevitable connect between Freire's Marxist thought and his religious commitments and affiliations and how it shaped Freire's philosophical understanding and views on knowledge as constructed rather than derived and must be understood contextually as historically and culturally informed discourses. In the first section, the paper distinguishes between radical and liberal ideology and how Freire's writings can be placed under the radical liberal humanistic vision of education. This paper further explores Freire's educational philosophy as shaped and influenced by his life experiences and helped him develop his idea of conscientisation as derived from his religious beliefs. The paper concludes that Freire combined both material and cultural reality to articulate a process of social change and therefore gives prime importance to education in his revolutionary theory of social transformation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire is generally considered to be 'the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy' (McLaren, 2000).

The writings of Freire provide a critical perspective on education and help us to recognise the relationship between education and power.

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He was the first internationally recognised philosopher who saw every educational act as political and raised vital questions on the issues of oppression, marginalisation, dominance and liberation. He brought the political nature of education to the public discourse, and the effects of unequal power relations affecting education that inevitably emerge from capitalist economies. In the contemporary times, when educational scenarios across the world have been dominated by the neo-liberal ideologies, the work of Paulo Freire has been considered seminal as it provides a provocative lens for examining educational policies and practices. Most of the educational policies remain silent on issues of political, economic and cultural ideologies and on how these ideologies work together to reproduce discriminatory practices. Thus, it becomes imperative to look at the theoretical underpinnings and work of Paulo Freire to understand the subordination of the wider aims of education by market forces.

In the current educational context, the ideas of Freire help in creating conducive learning environment for bringing equality and social justice in education. This paper will offer a descriptive perspective to understand Freire's writings which have been considered eclectic by many scholars. His writings draw from varied sources ranging from philosophical to sociological, and he drew insights from different disciplines and

traditions. He amalgamated ideas of Existentialism, Marxism, Humanism, Radical Liberation Theology and Dialectics to form his own theory that addresses education and its relation with social change. In order to understand the writings of Paulo Freire, it becomes crucial to focus on the social and philosophical background that forms Freire's educational thought. This paper is an attempt to understand Freire's philosophical orientation that shaped his educational ideas and, in this respect, an attempt has also been made to study the impact of Marxist ideology and Christian influences on his work.

Freire developed his conception of education as a practice of freedom significantly from both radical and liberal perspective on education. This made his theory an area of constant contestation. Allman (1994) argues with conviction that the misappropriation of Freire into "educational practice is not necessarily due to his faulty theorising; but the lack of understanding of his philosophical roots in Marxism as well as of misunderstanding the vital differences between a liberal and radical ontology" (cited in Mayo, 2008, p. 5). To understand and appreciate the depth of Freire's work, it is crucial to locate both radical and liberal elements in his writings as well as understanding the elements of Marxian theory. The following section of the paper would try to demarcate liberal and radical

ideologies in educational thought and place Freire’s theory accordingly.

**RADICAL AND LIBERAL EDUCATION**

Askew and Carnell (1998) use a four-fold classification based on a matrix (Figure 1) that maps beliefs about knowledge and the role of education in society. They raise fundamental questions such as: Is knowledge extrinsic or intrinsic to the individual

and is the task of education to fit people into existing society or to question the nature of that society?

One can see that the radical education stands in sharp contrast to a liberal conception of education. Here, liberal education is referred to the ‘modern’ liberal education, which is the product of the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution and not specifically the ‘ancient’ tradition

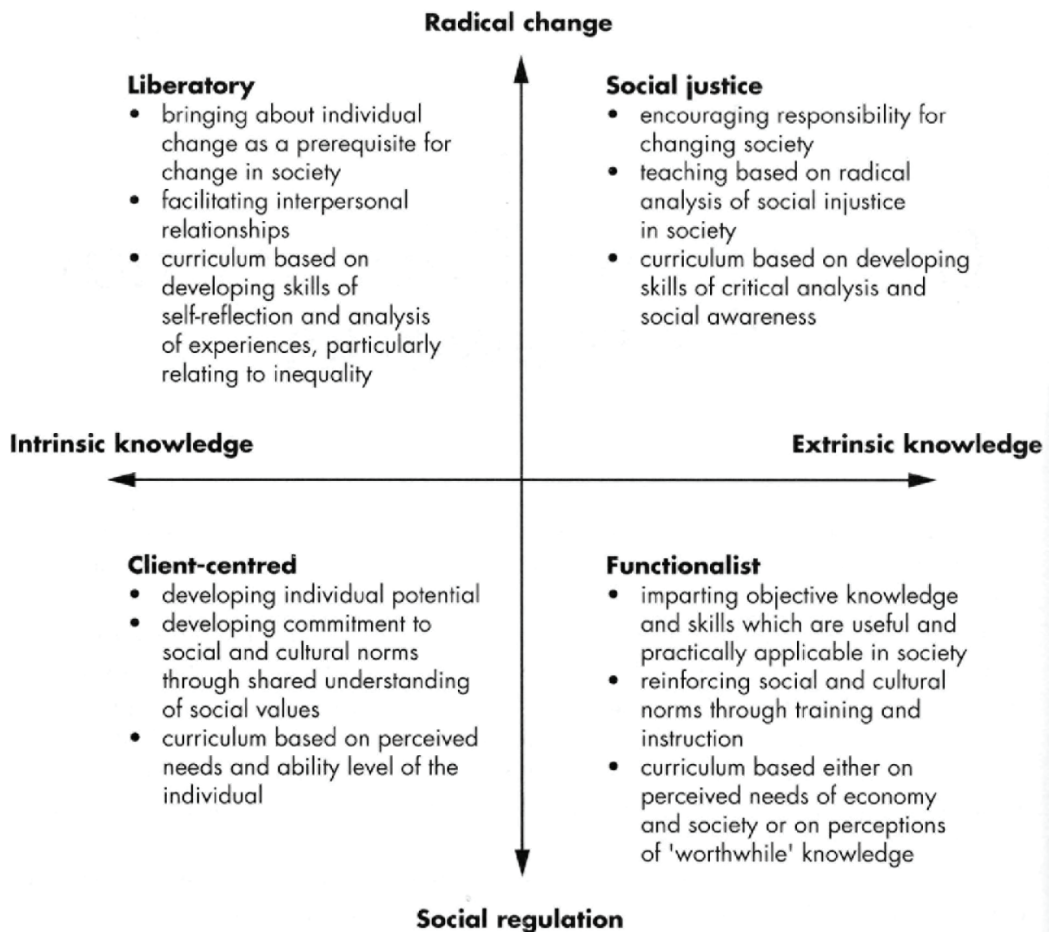


Figure 1. Radical and Liberal Education  
Source: Askew and Carnell (1998)

of liberal education<sup>1</sup>. With the spread of capitalism and the advent of mass schooling as an institutionalised form of education, notions about individuality, ability, meritocracy *versus* equity and social justice have been in contestation. Thus, the institutionalisation of education has to deal with issues of choosing the individual freedom to excel or to cater to the notion of social justice for an equitable education. As stated earlier, the vital differences between radical and liberal ideology were important to understand Freire's writings. One of the key differences between a liberal and radical ontology revolves around the relation between the individual and community. Lange (2012) explains that radicals proposed a social ontology whereby individuals are fundamentally individuals-in-social-relations rather than liberal autonomous individuals who relate to the external world. Liberal education focuses upon the individual and his self-refinement whereas Marxist thinkers recognise individual only as a part of the collective. For Marx, individuals are constituted by their relations to other humans, to history, and to society. This Marxian ontology is diametrically opposed to the liberal ontology within capitalist free market societies — where reality is composed of separate, atomistic individuals who relate to each other and things in external ways.

Further, Marx suggested that politics and economics were conceptually separated in liberal

bourgeois thought as a way to dominate without appearing to dominate. For instance, as long as people have a vote and a say through their representative in a political democracy, they will not contest injustice and the profound lack of democracy in the economic sphere. Allman (cited in Mayo, 2008, p. 9) argues that thus “liberal notions of freedom are illusory. There is a profound lack of democracy in economic lives.” Freire too was acutely aware of capitalism and its relation with economy. He developed his pedagogy keeping in mind the Brazilian rural poor who were oppressed by large landowners, as well as with the urban poor who had been dispossessed of their land and subsequently urbanised and exploited (Lange, 2012). He assumed that both groups had already been enclosed into a capitalist economic system where they had become ‘beings-for-another’ rather than ‘beings-for-themselves’. They had been subsumed into a system of domination where “the oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination... everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). Hence, for both Marxism and Liberalism, education is an instrument to achieve different goals. A detailed discussion on radical and Marxian theoretical underpinnings is elaborated in the next section.

Marx strongly asserted that liberal society artificially separates

individuals from the community, community from environment, economics from politics, and production from production relations, rather than seeing these phenomena as all internally related, as faces of the same phenomena. For Marxists, schooling as it exists in liberal and industrial society maintains and upholds the *status quo* of the privileged. No aspect of material life remains untouched by capitalist beliefs, which transmits its ideology through various institutions of society — education being the foremost. In fact, Marxists<sup>2</sup> claim that liberalism is the ideology of the ruling class. This leads us to an inevitable connect between education and ideology. Often, ideology is closely coupled with the concept of power. The dominant group maintains its ideological control through hegemony (Gramsci, 1997). Hegemony thus governs common sense or reality by making particular ideas seem normal or natural. David Hicks (2004, p. 2) argues that ideology is therefore not “something abstract since it powerfully shapes our perceptions of both self and society”. Radical ideology in education challenges the fundamental premises of these dominant beliefs and tries to find the roots of the economic, political and social disparities in society. Radical education often makes a crucial distinction between schooling and education. With the advent of industrialisation and the increasing division of labour under capitalism

led education manifest itself in the form of schooling. Radicals like John Holt (1969), Paulo Freire (1970) and Ivan Illich (1971) find the process of schooling as detachment from the child’s immediate environment and as an act of ‘banking’. They view schooling as essential to promote the continuity of *status quo* in existing unequal structures. This view stands in sharp contrast to the functionalist view of education where schooling is perceived to contribute to social consensus and restoration of social order.

Radical-Marxists criticise schooling for its role in sustaining and strengthening *status quo*. Lichtenstein (1984) distinguishes between radical liberalism and Marxist analysis of education (left wing radicalism) in his paper on ‘Radical Liberalism and Radical Education’. He argues that radical liberalism is an association of two divergent philosophical perspectives that is liberalism and left-wing radicalism. The ‘liberal’ perspective seeks to liberate individuals from political and/or economic power, and the ‘radical’ perspective seeks to overturn a social order based on privilege and property. He builds that these radical theories of education lie in a distinct paradigm of traditional liberalism on the one hand, and Marxism on the other. As the radical theorists share the liberal thrust of traditional liberalism, they discard the three basic principles of liberalism, which are: possessive individualism, private

property and political democracy (Lichtenstein, 1984).

On the other hand, the radical liberal paradigm shares a Marxist critique of education, while rejecting the materialistic philosophy of Marxism. Lichtenstein (1985) termed this paradigm as a critical, non-Marxian analysis of the education process. Therefore, the intermediate position taken by this paradigm, Lichtenstein assigns the term 'radical liberal' to it. Subsequently, he outlines six characteristics or 'coordinates' of this philosophical foundation such as *pluralism, developmental individualism, solidarity, egalitarianism, participatory democracy* and *social transformation*. Each of these is elaborated in the following section.

*Pluralism* supports autonomous and voluntary associations of people in which political and economic power is vested equally. A society constitutes of various centres of power and of people with diverse interests. It opposes the sovereignty of the centralised state and the concentrations of political and economic power. According to Freire, the banking model of education violates basic pluralistic values by centralising initiative and authority. Thus, students have no capacity to exercise control over the educational process, and become mere receptacles of given information.

*Developmental Individualism* here means the pluralistic ethic of a developmental range and not the

possessive individualism as viewed by neo-classical economic theory. Radical liberals 'see the human essence not as consumption of utilities but as the active exertion and development of individual potentialities'. Freire (1970) observes how the creative and activist impulses of people are negated by education. The culture of the oppressor dominates the oppressed class and the latter learn to imitate their oppressors by accepting it.

The third coordinate of *Solidarity* refers to the individual's identification with the group (community, nation). It is a form of collective consciousness. It is opposed to anti-authoritarianism, and to systems of meritocracy and hierarchy. However, Lichtenstein (1985) reminds the distinction between 'weak' solidarity of radical liberal position and the 'strong' solidarity of the socialist view. He also highlights how a yearning for a pre-industrial brotherhood, an idea central to modern Christian humanism, is foregrounded in the work of Freire.

*Egalitarianism* manifests itself among radical liberals as a total rejection of social privilege and social oppression. It hopes for a classless future where all individuals are equally free. For Freire, the education-led social revolution would negate the oppressor-oppressed negation, and would presumably result in a classless, egalitarian society.

*Participatory Democracy* negates the mainstream idea of a liberal

distinction between the political and the social-economic spheres. It demands participatory as opposed to representative democratic principles to all spheres of life. Freire viewed the problem posing method of education as the one in which knowledge is created through active participation and dialogue. Participants would relate in a non-authoritative manner. Thus, students would become teachers, and teachers would become students in a Freirean classroom.

The last characteristic is *Radical Transformation* that sets the radical liberal apart from the mainstream laissez-faire liberal (Lichtenstein, 1985). It envisions a radical transformation of the modern industrial society to promote egalitarian, developmental, solidaristic, participatory and democratic ideals. It is a desire for a revolution in cultural values and in social practices through education. 'The primary goal of radical liberal educators is the liberation of people from oppression and from the constraints imposed by a class-divided industrial society. They see a social transformation leading to a non-alienating, developmental, libertarian culture.'

However, a close examination of the radical liberal literature reveals that the radical liberal vision of a humane, developmental, participatory and egalitarian learning environment is not unique and is generally shared by Marxist educators as well. Lichtenstein argues that radical

liberal and Marxist education theory are different on the issue of education, and therefore should not be placed in the same 'radical' category. Although both emphasise the reproduction and legitimation of the economic system through education, radical liberal educators tend to attribute the problems of contemporary education to the commercialisation of social values and the dehumanisation which arises out of industrialisation. Similarly, Marxist educators observe the same problems in education but attribute these problems directly to the dynamics of capitalism.

They believe that it is not due to industrialisation, or cultural deterioration *per se* but the exploitative and authoritarian manner in which production occurs in capitalistic economic system. Lichtenstein further attributes the difference between radical liberal and Marxist educators directly to the materialistic philosophy which defines Marxism. As for Marx, matter is the ultimate reality, that is, only the material things are real; thus he totally rejects the metaphysical position which postulates the ultimately real in the non-material. This approach is typically rejected by radical liberals. Radical liberals give more attention to the prospects of social transformation (which both groups desire) through conscientisation. For them, education leads to liberation and can emancipate humanity by awakening and elevating the consciousness (i.e., 'conscientising', to use Freirean terminology) of the

learner. Thus, radical liberals give prime importance to education in their theories of social change.

Marxist educators, on the other hand, stress the primacy of capitalist production, and would directly link any educational alternative to more fundamental economic alternatives. For Marxists, the radical liberals do not tie 'their praxis-oriented, consciousness raising education alternative to a larger programme of revolutionary change' (Lichtenstein, 1985, p. 1). Thus, they view the radical liberal approach having a transcendental, idealistic and utopian quality to it. In the light of the above, it can be argued that Freire's work is perceived with the radical liberal humanistic vision of education. His critique of education is tied to a critique of capitalism but he gave importance to Cultural Revolution that can be brought in through education rather than material reorganisation of society as espoused by orthodox Marxists. As articulated above, that Freirean theory derives its substance from Marxism; therefore in the following section, the areas of similarity and departure from Marxist theory are discussed.

### **INFLUENCE OF MARX OVER FREIRE**

At the core of Freire's pedagogy lies the basic principles of Marxism and to appreciate his pedagogical theory, it is important to understand the Marxian underpinnings inherent in his work. Allman elaborates that the

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is written in a dialectical style and his dialectical conceptualisation of oppression and revolution are deeply rooted in his understanding of social theory derived from Marx. Mayo (2008) echoes the same concern asserting that the more one is familiar with Marx's conception of dialectics, inner connections and relations, as 'unities of opposites', the more one begins to appreciate the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and its Marxian underpinnings. Just like Marx, Freire's use of the term 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' referred to historical class distinctions and class conflict within the structures of capitalist society. Thus, Freire's idea of oppression draws from a classical Marxian theory of history where he saw both liberation and oppression as historical, collective actions of classes. To dwell deeply on Marxian influence on Freire's work, it is important to understand the use of the concept of Dialectic Materialism and Alienation present in his writings.

### **DIALECTIC MATERIALISM**

Drawing on ideas from Hegel and Marx, Freire adopted a dialectical approach towards understanding the world. Glass (2001) asserts that Freire's theological ontology and his theory of conscientisation shades into Marxist politics that reinterpreted Hegel's analysis of the master-slave relationship. Dialectical materialism is a complex theoretical and philosophical system. However, a brief introduction about the



concept is necessary to explain its usage in Freire's work. Dialectics as a notion tries to understand the essence of the things rather than their appearance. It begins with the opposite characteristics of objects to understand its true essence as it is believed that everything is not as it appears on the surface. In dialectics, the form and content of a thing can be contrary. The tensions between these contradictions can be understood through dialectics. Thus, the underlying idea is that all things are actually processes and that these processes are in constant motion, or development. This development is driven by the two interrelated opposites acting in contradiction with each other (Gadotti, 1994; Au, 2007). These two opposites exist with each other as they make up a unified whole. Hence, they are deeply integrated. A dialectical conception of the world sees it as a layered, interrelated system, a totality, a chain of relationships and processes (Gadotti, 1994). Dialectics can be understood to mean that everything in the universe — including society — is in a state of constant conflict and change. The tensions and conflicts in contradictory aspects become the driving force for change.

Freire's position is consistent with the fundamental tenets of dialectical materialism as he placed particular emphasis on contradictions in the social world. For him, any social phenomena cannot be understood in isolation, rather as a part of

totality. Therefore, the contradiction between oppressor and the oppressed in his theory subsume a dialectic relationship as oppressors can only exist as oppressors in the presence of their opposite, the oppressed and the two groups stand in an inherently contradictory relationship. He equated dialectic thinking with critical thinking and called the process of dialectical thinking as "epistemological encircling: a means of moving closer by gaining a certain kind of distance" (Roberts, 2000, p. 37). Just as Marxist dialectics could only be understood by the practical struggle to overcome the contradictions in capitalism, in a similar vein Freire's conception of dialectics can be perceived not just in thought, but also in practice. His notion of praxis: a dialectic relation between theory and practice, can be seen as an extension of Marxian thought.

### **ALIENATION**

Freire built upon Marx's notion of alienation. For Marx, the material conditions of life generate alienation. Capitalism generates economic alienation, which touches every aspect of people's lives. Marx refers to the alienation of people from aspects of their 'human nature' and through alienation, men get estranged from the product of their labour, from their species-being. He believed that alienation is a systematic result of capitalism (Mathews, 1980). Freire in a similar light condemned the liberal notion of society being a collection of

isolated and atomistic individuals. Subsequently for Freire, there is no private conscience but a socially formed one. He rightly focused on a network of social relations rather than the individual and believed that practice, struggle and politics are the essence of social transformation.

### **FREIRE AND EARLY MARX**

Freire's writings draw from the early humanitarian Marx where Marx specifically critiqued industrial capitalism and envisioned a social change process beyond it. To quote Marx, "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself." In these few words, Marx showed that changes in society are not the result of mechanical results from changed circumstances, but arise from human beings, own activity in changing their circumstances. Marx gave primacy to freedom and envisaged education and free time as essential to developing free individuals and 'creating many-sided human beings' (Kellner, 2003, p. 3). In this way, increasing free time under socialism would allow for more education and development of a social individual. These early writings by Marx provide important sources of reference for some of the arguments raised in Freire's best known work,

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's reading of Marx influences his notion of oppressor and oppressed and his conception of praxis. It seemed that he took Marx's famous observation quite seriously that, "the philosophers have only interpreted the world differently: the point is, however, to change it" (Marx cited in Craig, 2005, p. 620).

Consequently, Freire's notion of praxis that humans have the ability to consciously and intentionally transform the world, derives straight from Marx's ideas about revolution. According to Freire, what makes us distinctly human is our ability to engage in praxis. Praxis is 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1972, cited in Roberts, 2000, p. 42). Similarly, Freire's notion that human beings are makers of history (1998, p. 115) too is 'influenced' by Marx's view of humans as determined by history. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, p. 44), Freire describes what he calls the process of dehumanisation as: "Dehumanisation, which marks not only humanity 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 a historical vocation. Indeed, to admit of dehumanisation as a historical vocation would lead either to cynicism or total despair."

Like Marx, Freire too believed that human nature is not individualistic but a collective product. For Freire, our consciousness is first and

foremost a social consciousness (Roberts, 2003). Thus, for Freire (cited in Au, 2007, p. 5), “Subjects cannot think alone” and that there is no longer an ‘I think’ but ‘we think’. Humans, as communicative beings, enter into relationships with one another, and create a social world. Like Marx, Freire too stressed on unity, solidarity and a shared sense of commitment among the oppressed towards creating a better social world. He insisted that the unity of human beings is all the more important in our current “perverse era of neoliberal philosophy” (Freire, 1998, p. 115).

Freire’s indebtedness to Marx included understanding the impact of material conditions on human agency. In *The German Ideology* (cited in Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 111), Marx and Engels wrote, “It is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means...Liberation is a historical and not a mental act.” However, Freire extends this understanding further by viewing liberation not entirely as a historical act (although this recognition is important), but as a mental act as well. For Freire, change in the form of social transformation could only occur through reflection, recognition and action of the oppressed to free themselves from oppressive conditions (*Ibid.*). This is an important point of departure from Marxist theory.

### **DIVERSION FROM MARXIST IDEOLOGY**

Freire’s pedagogy, at its core, is based on a Marxist, dialectical

materialist epistemological view of consciousness, human interaction, and material transformation (Au and Apple, 2007). There are excellent treatises on Freire’s Marxist politics (McLaren, 2000), his Marxist conception of consciousness (Allman, 1994). However, Au (2007) argues that a sustained explication of the Marxism in Freire’s pedagogy remains absent. Marx never explicitly wrote about education and his sphere of writings revolved around economics and society. In contrast, Freire takes the sphere of education to be of central importance. In addition, Marxist thinking underpins Freire’s belief in the conditioning (but not determining) of people by their socio-historical reality (Freire, 1998, pp. 54–58, 115–116); this is an important diversion from Marxist thinking. In Freire’s words, “If I am a pure product of genetic, cultural, or class determination, I have no responsibility for my action in the world and, therefore, it is not possible for me to speak of ethics. Of course, this assumption of responsibility does not mean that we are not conditioned genetically, culturally, and socially. It means that we know ourselves to be conditioned but not determined” (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

While Freire did indeed see an objective world outside of our consciousness, he also recognised that it was a world that we learn through our subjective lenses as human beings (Roberts, 2003). This is an important point of

departure from Marxist thinking. In his work, he attempted to posit a dialectical relationship between the objective world and our subjective understanding and knowledge of that world. For instance, in *Politics and Education* (Freire, cited in Au, 2007, p. 19), he addressed the issue as follows: “Consciousness and the world cannot be understood separately, in a dichotomised fashion, but rather must be seen in their contradictory relations. Not even consciousness is an arbitrary producer of the world or of objectivity, nor is it a pure reflection of the world.”

Marx and Freire’s notion of history differs in another important aspect. Though Marx argues that humans are subjected to history and act according to socio-historical antecedents, Freire maintained that humans can shed shackles of history through critical historical analysis. In his view, individual and social transformation is possible through this historical analysis. The ultimate resolution of Marxism is communism, for Freire resolution is achieved through conscientisation. Freire however avoided the deterministic implications of Marxism by emphasising the existential capacity of humans to influence their circumstances. He did not negate the phenomenal and existential nature of the individual. For Freire, humans, though historical beings are aware of a past and are able to conceive of a future. As responsible beings, humans have an awareness of their

own unfinishedness (Freire, 1998, p. 56). Humans, unlike animals, make history and thus consciously transform the world around them. The vocation of all human beings is to realise this capacity — to live as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons (*Ibid.*, p. 45). He further built that humans are in constant, dialectical, critical reflection with the material and social worlds. The capacity that makes us human is that we can wishfully act through our critical reflection to change those worlds.

Fatalism present in both classical Marxism and neoliberal ideas was troubling to Freire because it eroded the primary role of human agency in bringing social change and eliminated history in the process. Freire was critical of class relations as he believed that oppression does not take place only on the social plane but also at the individual level. And it is just on this level that authoritarianism can be seen and it is just here that oppression must begin to be fought by changing the consciousness of both the oppressed as well as the oppressor. Unlike Marx, Freire talked about a cultural reorganisation of society although he did not negate the importance of the material reorganisation of society. Freire gave precedence to culture as a ‘superstructure’ rather than material reality. So, ‘salvation’ comes from pedagogy that ignites political consciousness and leads to revolution. Further, he argued that

“I interpret the revolutionary process as dialogical cultural action which is prolonged in ‘cultural revolution’ once power is taken” (Freire, 1970, p. 160). For Freire, ideology cannot be changed through martial laws. Aspects of the previous ideology which are found inside the same educational practice can be questioned through education. One cannot hope that, when the mode of production is changed, all social relationships will mechanically change. Thus, Freire maintained that “Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution” (*Ibid.*, p. 90).

Further, Freire stated “Through... cultural remnants the oppressor society continues to invade” (1970, p. 159). For Freire, revolutionary leaders must “initiate a cultural revolution”. Cultural revolution takes the total society to be reconstructed, including all human activities, as the object of its remolding action. In his words, “It is the revolutionary regime’s maximum effort at conscientisacao [conscientisation] — it should reach everyone, regardless of their personal path” (Freire, 1970, pp. 158–59). Unlike radicals (Holt, 1967; Illich, 1973) who went for a complete overhaul of the schooling system, Freire saw possibility in existing schools although he was criticised by left-wing scholars for defending school system. He argued that schools can perform other tasks rather than reproducing the dominant ideology. This does not exhaust the role of the school. For

him, schooling can contradict the task of reproducing the dominant ideology and thus demythologise ideological reproduction (Gadotti, 1994). Hence for Freire, there are no short cuts for a revolution. Revolution should be brought in by listening to the oppressed; should incorporate the already possessed knowledge of the people and work upon their already possessed understanding to bring in conscientisation.

### **FREIRE AND CHRISTIANITY**

Lichtenstein (1985) argues that Freire’s analysis of liberation and social change can be best understood in reference to his Christian humanist heritage. Marx negates the role of religion as he believed that it preserves the social order of which it is a by-product, both by deflecting attention from unquestioned belief and by providing escape from the real. On the contrary, for Freire, Marxism and Christianity could be regarded by some as contradictory frameworks, but insisted that he was able to manage that tension: “I always spoke to both of them [Christ and Marx] in a very loving way. You see, I feel comfortable in this position. Sometimes, people say to me that I am contradictory. My answer is that I have the right to be contradictory, and secondly, I don’t consider myself contradictory in this... if you ask me, then, if I am a religious man, I say no...I would say that I am a man of faith...I feel myself very comfortable with this” (Horton and Freire, 1990,

p. 247). Gadotti (1994, p. 64) remarked that “As a left-wing thinker, Paulo Freire believes that being a Christian does not mean being a reactionary, and that being a Marxist does not mean being an inhuman bureaucrat. Christians should reject exploitation.”

During his youth, Freire found inspiration in the French tradition of Christian humanism. Through his involvement with the youth catholic action movement, Freire familiarised himself with the incipient liberation theology movement that endorsed the principle that Christians have a moral obligation to reject exploitation (Gadotti, 1994). His work as a consultant for the World Council of Churches for a period of 10 years further exposed him to what was to be known as the most radical version of liberation theology, which is actually heavily Marxian. However, while working with workers and peasants, Freire started to question notions of exploitation, inequality and started to explore answers through Marxist theory. Indeed, in many works, particularly the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire used some of the analytical tools of Marxism. This nevertheless did not make him abandon his Christian humanist philosophy: “God led me to the people, and the people led me to Marx ... But when I met Marx, I continued to meet Christ on the corners of the streets - by meeting the people” (Freire, 1974, cited in Walker, 1980, p. 126).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is precisely in this dialogue between Christian humanism and Marxist humanism where the foundation of Freire’s philosophical approach and the core concepts of his political-educational theory can be traced. He combined both material and cultural reality to articulate a process of social change; therefore his work can be perceived with the radical liberal humanistic vision of education. Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that the radical liberal call for social revolution through education is possible through praxis which is the core of his epistemology, as the process of human critical reflection and taking conscious, transformative action on the world. Through praxis, humans act both individually and collectively as subjects in the world as opposed to being objects to be acted upon. They can act to transform their reality as subjects. Freire viewed it as a constant state of development in which humans go on to a state of being, in search of becoming fully human and can achieve liberation from oppression. Cultural revolution will help in viewing liberation not entirely as a historical act but as a mental act as well. Change in the form of social transformation could occur first through reflection and recognition; and then through the action of the oppressed to free

themselves from the oppressive conditions. The oppressed imbibes their marginal and subordinate status and their general submersion into a 'culture of silence' thus becoming objects to be acted upon (Freire, 1970, p. 30). Only through

this process can people come to see and act upon the oppressive relations in which they find themselves. Revolution through 'conscientisation' is, according to Freire, the act of creating a humanised world; it is an act of love and humility.

### End Notes

1. For ancient Greeks, liberal education was necessary for a human being to be free and identify with human good. The development of the human being to their full potential was considered necessary through education so that people can participate in civic life.
2. Here Marxism refers to the orthodox view that has a strong characteristic of economic determinism rather than humanitarian Marxism which stresses on the humanist components of Marx's thought.

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