Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 1

Guiding Questions:

Who is affected by the process of dehumanization? How might that affect the role of oppressors and the oppressed in the process of humanization?

How might one avoid working through "false generosity"? What is at risk if people are not genuine in their struggle with the oppressed?

At the start of the chapter, Freire introduces what he calls "humankind's central problem": the problem of "humanization" (the natural human drive to affirm ourselves as human beings) and "dehumanization," which is a product of historical oppression. Though both humanization and dehumanization are possible for all people, people naturally strive to become more humanized, a process that is constantly undermined by "injustice, exploitation, and…violence." Dehumanization is not our destiny as people, but rather the product of an unfair social order.

> "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. The struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons would be meaningless. This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (44).

Because of this, the most important task of oppressed people is to liberate themselves (and their oppressors) from an unjust system. When oppressors appear to help oppressed people, Freire argues that they often harbor a "false generosity" that relies on oppression to work. To truly help oppressed people, one must join the struggle to destroy oppression entirely.

Any movement to defeat oppression has to be led by oppressed people. Oppressed people have the most experience with oppression's effects, and in fighting for their humanity they demonstrate how necessary liberation is. However, at the beginning of this fight, oppressed people sometimes act like oppressors themselves. An oppressive system shapes the attitudes of oppressed people, and makes them believe that they should become just like oppressors. This means that oppressed people do not always see themselves as "oppressed" at first, holding onto the "fear of freedom". Freire boils down the oppressor/oppressed relationship to one of "prescription": oppressed people behave in ways prescribed to them by their oppressors. Freire suggests that oppressed people fear freedom because it requires them to

reject these internalized ideals and behaviors. Nevertheless, freedom is a constant goal for all people, "the indispensable condition" for feeling complete as a person.

To overcome oppression, people must begin to recognize its causes so that they can transform their conditions and begin to create a new society. But at the same time, people also have to confront their internalized beliefs and ideas that hinder their freedom. For Freire, this becomes the role of a "pedagogy of the oppressed": to help the oppressed critically examine the nature of oppression, and take action to change their conditions. This pedagogy should also be led, at least in part, by oppressed people, so that they play an active role in their own liberation. Beginning the struggle for liberation in this way is difficult, for both oppressed people and oppressors who become aware of their problematic role in society. But Freire argues that the concrete work of helping people become free is a vital way to overcome these challenges.

The results of liberation should be twofold and dialectical: there should be an objective change in how society works, and a subjective change in how people perceive the world. Both are necessary because the relationship between people and the world are interconnected: human action has created our society, and human action can change it for the future. These changes can only occur through "praxis," the combination of reflection and action aimed at transforming the world. When only one occurs, true liberation is not possible. Oppressors use a variety of techniques to dissuade oppressed people from critical reflection: if oppressed people realize that they live in an oppressive system, more will be spurred to take action against it. Consequently, a pedagogy that helps create freedom should let oppressed people take the lead in deciding what's best for themselves.

A pedagogy of the oppressed is designed to help people regain their humanity. A pedagogy led by oppressors, like traditional Western education, cannot truly help oppressed people because it is a product of the oppressive system that must be overthrown. All the same, only the oppressors have the political power to implement a pedagogy on a large scale—which is why Freire recommends using smaller "educational projects" to introduce liberating ideas to the people. Freire sees his pedagogy in two stages. In the first stage, oppressed people become aware of their status as "oppressed people," and commit to changing their conditions. When the oppressed have succeeded in freeing themselves, the second stage expands the pedagogy's scope to include all people—not just the oppressed.

A key part of the first stage involves understanding the consciousnesses of oppressors and oppressed people, and especially the inner conflicts of oppressed people. Freire defines oppression as an act of exploitation, violence, and a failure "to recognize others as persons." Not only do oppressors commit violence against the oppressed by keeping them from being fully human, they often stereotype oppressed people as "violent" for responding to oppression. Because of this, the struggle of liberation is an act of love, an attempt to restore the humanity of all people. True liberation does not only remove oppressors from power, but also creates a society in which the role of "oppressor" does not exist.

Freire then examines the oppressor consciousness in greater detail. More than anything, oppressors prioritize "their right to live in peace"—but concede that they also depend on oppressed people's existence to hold power. Oppressors have a "materialistic" view toward their lives: through oppression, they attempt to transform the world, people, and time into objects that can be owned. And because oppressors feel that they can own humanity, they see the fight for humanization and freedom as inherently dangerous. Oppressors also rely on controlling others, to the point that Freire calls them "necrophilic" or life-killing. Freire acknowledges that oppressors can join the fight for liberation with oppressed people, but he argues that the oppressors often bring oppressive beliefs and perspectives with them.

People who commit themselves to human liberation should constantly reflect on their preexisting beliefs and biases. To authentically achieve freedom, a convert should be able to work with oppressed people, without seeing them as ignorant or untrustworthy. He or she should also examine how oppressed people think, in order to see where the oppressive system affects their perspective. Freire suggests that oppressed people sometimes take on a "fatalistic" view towards their circumstances, because they have been taught that their misfortunes are the product of things out of their control (like God, or fate). Freire continues to detail the oppressed consciousness, noting that oppressed people often feel alienated from society and undervalue themselves. A pedagogy of the oppressed should rely on the knowledge and experiences of oppressed people, even if those people are not initially confident in their abilities or value.

According to Freire, oppressed people can begin to gain confidence and conviction when they learn about the causes of oppression, and see that their oppressors can be vulnerable. A key part of liberation is this movement from passive acceptance to active participation in the struggle. Along the way, the oppressed should enter into dialogue with others to push for freedom together; when people try to liberate the oppressed without their participation, they remove their agency, treating them "as objects which must be saved from a burning building." Leaders in the fight should trust oppressed people to come to their own conclusions. Freire argues that political leaders should approach liberation in a "pedagogical" way, since educational methods can be used to shift how oppressed people think. However, if this is not done in dialogue with the oppressed, it can resemble propaganda. Leaders and the people must take on the task of reflection and action together.

Notes

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 2

Guiding Questions:

What is at stake using the "banking model", even when used by revolutionaries?

What does the "problem-posing" method of education force individuals to do?

The Western classroom focuses on its "narrative" aspects: the teacher is a "narrating Subject" with students who are passive. The teacher's narration is disconnected from the students' life experiences, and students memorize these facts without understanding their full meaning or context. This "banking" model of education, one in which teachers "deposit" knowledge into the minds of their students, is problematic because it stifles creativity, and does not encourage students to ask new questions through praxis.

Knowledge is the result of a constant process of questioning the world. However, the "banking" model conceives of knowledge as something that teachers have and students lack. This approach is closely tied to oppression, because it presumes that the people who don't have power are ignorant. Pedagogy which aims to help oppressed people become free must change the contradictory relationship between teachers and students.

The "banking" model molds the attitudes of students: it teaches them to adapt to the world as it is, instead of questioning it or trying to change it. This helps oppressors, who want to prevent oppressed people from understanding the true nature of oppression. Oppressors combine "banking" education with institutions like welfare, which treats oppressed people as if they exist outside of normal, "healthy" society. To liberate themselves, oppressed people cannot become "integrated" into oppressive society; rather, they must transform society entirely.

> "Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken"" (72-72).

Teachers who use the "banking" model—whether they are aware of it or not—do not

understand that the model reinforces oppression. But Freire notes that some students may begin to understand that their education is in conflict with their natural drive for freedom. Educators who truly want to help oppressed people cannot wait for this to happen—they should work with oppressed people, as fellow students, to achieve conscientização together. "Banking" education hinders this process through its assumptions about human beings and the world. In the "banking" model, people do not act on the world: they merely live in it and observe it. Teachers, then, control how their students observe the world and teach them to fit in.

The methods teachers use in the "banking" model create distance between them and their students. Authentic communication is essential in the classroom: teachers cannot impose their ideas on students, but should instead work with students equally. Just like oppression, the "banking" model is "necrophilic" and stifles the life of human beings. But the suffering that results from oppression can spur people to restore their personal freedom and power. Freire calls out the "banking" model as oppressive so that revolutionary leaders do not use it in the struggle for liberation. Revolutionary leaders often use this model already, but he urges them to "reject the banking concept in its entirety" and replace it with a new model: the "problem-posing" model.

In stark contrast to "banking," a "problem-posing" pedagogy is based on communication and dialogue, and it fosters human freedom. It transforms the relationship between students and teachers, merging them into teacher-students and student-teachers. Everyone in the classroom teaches each other and learns from each other. While the "banking" model consists of active teachers and passive students, the "problem-posing" model makes both groups into "co-investigators" who question reality together. The "problem-posing" model pushes students to gain critical awareness, because it uses topics and problems that are relevant to the students' experiences. This, in turn, challenges students to take action and face those problems.

When education is designed to foster freedom, it treats human beings and the world as intimately connected. Freire supplies the example of a peasant student in a Chilean class, who argued that human beings must exist in the world to call it a "world" in the first place—and compares the peasant's point to French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's idea that human consciousness and the world are interdependent. "Problem-posing" education helps people develop their understanding of the world, so that they see the world as constantly in flux. While "banking" separates people from history, "problem-posing" helps its students understand their place in history.

In the "problem-posing" model, human beings are incomplete and are working to fully become themselves. This means that education is also an ongoing process, a big difference from the lack of change in the "banking" model. "Problem-posing" is "revolutionary futurity," according to Freire, because it relies on the hope that oppression is changeable and can be defeated in the future. When oppressed people understand this, they can shift from feeling resolved to feeling empowered. Therefore, the movement for liberation must support oppressed people's

right to make decisions and ask questions for themselves in pursuit of humanization. It must rely on dialogue at every stage of the process.

Notes

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 3

Guiding Questions:

What is "radical love", and why is it necessary in dialogue? What does it require of educators?

Why should we focus on making people aware of the "themes" of the time? What will this help them better understand?

Freire continues his discussion of dialogue from the previous chapter as necessary in the process of liberation. He asserts that dialogue primarily consists of "the word"—which he equates with praxis, the combination of reflection and action. When reflection is not paired with action, it becomes "verbalism," and the word loses its power. And when action is not paired with reflection, it becomes "activism," and people risk taking action without reflecting on what those actions fully mean. To Freire, human existence ultimately boils down to the process of naming and transforming the world around us, and everyone should be able to start this process. Freire defines dialogue in these terms and he argues that dialogue is necessary for human beings to find freedom and meaning in their lives.

Dialogue is an act of radical love "for the world and for people," because it is a commitment to giving people control and agency as they investigate the world. Dialogue is also an act of humility, because it discourages any one person from having authority over another. Dialogue only exists if every dialoguer acknowledges his/her own imperfections, and understands that everyone has something valuable to contribute.

> "Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination… Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation… As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love… If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue" (89).

Thirdly, dialogue is an act of faith: faith in people's power to transform their world and create new ways of organizing society. This faith must take into account the oppressors' efforts to prevent oppressed people from using that power. When done correctly, dialogue should lead to mutual trust between the dialoguers.

Lastly, dialogue cannot exist without hope and critical thinking. Hope comes from human

beings' constant drive to complete themselves, and critical thinking comes from the drive to change reality. Dialogue begins when the educator decides what he/she will dialogue about in the classroom. Dialogical education should address what students (or "student-teachers") want to know about, and engage with what they know already. The "banking" model seeks to change people, but "problem-posing" seeks to change the world with people.

When political leaders and educators begin the process of dialogue, they should try to understand the objective conditions of oppressed people, and how oppressed people perceive those conditions. Because the class presents these conditions as "problems," it pushes the participants to think and act for themselves as they respond to each problem. The class must also use language that is clear and relatable to its participants. From here, Freire switches gears to discuss the subject matter of a "problem-posing" classroom: he says that it should primarily focus on the "thematic universe" of its students. Before defining the term more specifically, Freire grounds his idea of "themes" in how human beings see the world and history. Other animals exist outside of history—they are not aware of a past, present, or future, so they adapt to the world as it is—while humans understand that they can transform the world over time.

As human beings begin to understand their relationship to the world, they understand that they are limited by their concrete experiences in the world—Freire calls these "limit-situations." Limit-situations are a product of history, which means that they are not permanent and can be overcome. Freire, in turn, sees history as the result of praxis, reflecting and acting on the world in order to change it. He divides history into a series of "epochs," periods of time that are characterized by peoples' ideas, values, and beliefs during that time. These ideas and beliefs exist in the world, and Freire calls their representation in the world "themes." Every theme has an opposite theme that reflects an opposing idea or belief. The "thematic universe," then, is the combination of themes interacting with each other during a particular epoch.

"Themes" and "limit-situations" are closely related—sometimes, oppressed people live in conditions that prevent them from understanding the ideas that created those conditions. If they overcome their limits, they could discover an "untested feasibility"—the idea that oppressed people can still exist without the circumstances that limit them. Limit-situations also imply that there are people who benefit from the situation, and others who are harmed by it. In this context, oppressors see the freedom of oppressed people as a limit to their power. According to Freire, the main themes of our historical moment are domination and liberation; the limit-situations are the structures of oppression that limit human freedom. Underdevelopment, for example, would be a limit-situation that impairs Third World countries. Themes can exist on multiple levels, and they exist even if people do not recognize them.

Education should push oppressed people and political leaders to investigate the "themes" of their time; this will help them understand reality as a whole and in terms of its parts. One way this happens is through "decoding": Freire creates a specific process through which educators

can make "themes" more visible to their students as they approach conscientização. Decoding consists of presenting a classroom with a "coded situation"—or a worldly condition that reflects a theme—and the class then responds to and analyzes the situation. But decoding is only one part of the larger "thematic investigation," which happens in stages inside and outside of the classroom. Thematic investigation is how educators and students become critically aware of reality (and of their own beliefs), which helps them begin to take action in the world. Like other parts of Freire's pedagogy, it requires dialogue and mutual trust between everyone involved.

The process of thematic investigation starts with the educators, who identify an area to work in and begin to observe it and its residents. Freire uses the example of an adult education class "in a peasant area with a high percentage of illiteracy." The educators should observe many different aspects of the peasants' lives, communicating with them and enlisting them as volunteers. Working as a team, the educators and peasants determine the most important conditions that are affecting the peasants, and then determine if the peasants are aware of the area's limit-situations and themes. Next, the educators use visual, auditory, or tactile materials to represent the limit-situations and themes—Freire calls these materials "codifications." The codifications should be simple and relatable to the peasants, but should challenge the peasants to come up with their own analysis. Freire cites a Chilean educator who experimented with "decoding" in his classroom to make his students more critical.

As the peasants and educators analyze the materials together, they reflect on each situation and their views toward it. Rather than prioritizing their view over the peasants' view, the educators must allow the peasants to speak freely about how the situations make them feel. Freire uses the example of a "codification" about alcoholism—while the educator might see it as automatically bad, the peasant might see himself in a person who drinks to cope with an oppressive job. Throughout this process, the educators listen and document the responses, and eventually begin to study them to find the themes they discussed earlier. Eventually, the educators use these results to make new class materials, which they present to the peasants as part of a more organized curriculum. This curriculum is a product of the educators' research, and reflects the topics that the peasants care about most. Most importantly, this curriculum allows the peasants to have authority and to think for themselves.

Notes

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 4

Guiding Questions:

What do revolutionary leaders need to avoid in the process of dialogue with the oppressed class?

In what ways does the oppressor attempt to control the oppressed?

Freire spends the final chapter discussing his theory of cultural action, or how people create changes in their culture and society. He reiterates the need for praxis and argues that praxis requires theory in order to be complete. Revolutionary leaders and oppressed people should both use praxis while struggling for liberation so that the leaders are not merely imposing their will onto the oppressed. Otherwise, the struggle will be hollow—Freire says that a "revolution for the people" is equivalent to "a revolution without the people." A revolution that sees oppressed people as ignorant, or objectifies them, buys into the myths oppressors use to keep their power.

> "The same is not true, however, of revolutionary leaders; if they do not think with the people, they become devitalized. The people are their constituent matrix, not mere objects thought of. Although revolutionary leaders may also have to think about the people in order to understand them better, this thinking differs from that of the elite; for in thinking about the people in order to liberate (rather than dominate) them, the leaders give of themselves to the thinking of the people. One is the thinking of the master; the other is the thinking of the comrade" (128).

To Freire, the key to an effective revolution is dialogue: both oppressors and revolutionaries have methods of changing society, but the oppressors' methods are inherently "antidialogical." Just as "problem-posing" education relies on dialogue, an effective revolution must be educational in nature.

Conquest. "Antidialogical action" is a way of changing culture that serves the interests of oppressors. Oppressors try to control people and the world by conquering and owning them. To prevent any further cultural change, they create myths about the world—such as the idea that oppression is permanent and encourages freedom, and that oppressed people must adapt to it. These myths are found in everything from religion and economics to education and property. Propaganda and mass media ensure that oppressed people internalize these myths, and cannot have authentic dialogue about the true nature of reality.

Divide and Rule. Oppressors divide and isolate oppressed people to prevent them from organizing together for liberation. This creates rifts among different groups of oppressed people and discourages them from dialogue. When communities cannot see that their problems are related, they are less likely to fight the oppressors' agenda. Oppressors also use "false generosity" to make the oppressed believe that they are being helped, but this false

generosity relies on conquest to keep the oppressed in need of help.

Manipulation. Oppressors use manipulation to control oppressed people and to prevent them from challenging the oppressors' power. The myths used in conquest are one example of this manipulation, but it also shows up when oppressor and oppressed classes make pacts (or other formal agreements) together. This creates the illusion of dialogue, but in reality the oppressors determine what the agreement is and then often don't follow it. Manipulation occurs when oppressed people first start to question the oppressive system. To combat it, revolutionary leaders should use critical awareness to constantly question the oppressors' authority. Freire contrasts revolutionary leaders with populist leaders, who claim to be an intermediary between the oppressed and their oppressors. Populism, along with things like welfare programs, are tools for manipulation that ultimately distract the oppressed from understanding the actual cause of their problems: oppression itself.

Cultural Invasion. In cultural invasion, oppressors impose their own values and beliefs onto an oppressed culture. Cultural invasion makes oppressed peoples' perspective align with that of the oppressors, so that the oppressors' culture seems superior. This pushes oppressed people to become more like the oppressors, and stabilizes the oppressors' position. Freire argues that cultural invasion is both a tool and a result of oppression, and that traditional homes and schools also use forms of the oppressive hierarchy. However, he says that the revolution can also convert "professionals" in education and government who come to understand the nature of oppression. The revolutionary process comes in two stages: "dialogical action" that combats the oppressors' power, and a "cultural revolution" that forms a new reality after the oppressed have won. While oppressors try to invade, and transform society, revolutions try to develop society in partnership with the oppressed.

Cooperation. From here, Freire discusses "dialogical action," which is what revolutionary leaders should use to attack the oppressors' antidialogical methods. Revolutionary leaders must have the support, dialogue, and trust of oppressed people to be effective, and cooperation is how this happens. Cooperation allows a revolutionary group to focus on oppression as a primary problem to solve. Leaders should account for oppressed peoples' internalized beliefs while validating their knowledge—and Freire includes a quote from Che Guevara that emphasizes how oppressed people helped create his political ideology. When done properly, this cooperation can create a fusion of the oppressed and their leaders into a united force.

Unity for Liberation. While oppressors see unity as dangerous, revolutionary leaders must seek unity in every part of the liberation movement. This is a difficult task, because oppression inherently divides and alienates people from the world and from each other. When oppressed people believe that the future is fixed, they will believe that changing the future with others is impossible. Therefore, achieving unity requires oppressed people to understand how and why they hold these beliefs—they must become aware of the myths that the oppressors have imposed on them.

Organization. Organization is the opposite of manipulation, and is the natural result of unity. While unifying the oppressed, revolutionary leaders are also trying to organize them to view liberation as a common goal. These leaders must show "witness" to oppressed people—they must express the importance of liberation, and show that they are acting out of love and faith in the oppressed. Oppressors do organize themselves apart from the people, which is why revolutionary leaders must organize "themselves with the people." Although these leaders should use discipline and guidance to keep their group focused, they cannot manipulate or conquer the oppressed along the way. Organization is a "highly educational process" that teaches both oppressed people and their leaders how to wield authority and freedom in service of each other.

Cultural Synthesis. Lastly, cultural synthesis is the opposite of cultural invasion. Freire says that all cultural action either attempts to preserve or change society; when it includes dialogue, cultural action can overcome the contradictions of oppressive society and achieve liberation for all people. Cultural synthesis does this by treating different cultures equally, and giving them both the same authority. It pushes people from different cultures to support each other and engage in dialogue, and it brings oppressed people's goals together with those of revolutionary leaders. Freire ends by returning to the broader ideas behind his cultural action theory: it is necessary to theorize methods for freedom because the oppressors need to theorize methods for domination. This theory of dialogical action is the direct result of praxis and dialogue among the oppressed and leaders, with the goal of humanizing all people.

Notes