The ethical foundation of critical pedagogy in contemporary academia: (self)-reflection and complicity in the process of teaching

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In this paper an ethical approach to educational methodology is discussed in relation to the philosophies of Emanuel Levinas and Robert Cox. Cox's anti-essentialist understanding of historical materialism and Levinas' metaphysical idealism are applied to an analysis of the (self)-reflective methods required today in Higher Education in the UK, such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Personal Development Planning (PDP). The paper identifies a post-Kantian paradigm of the subject–object dichotomy as a cause of the ontological constraints which pervade critical pedagogy, and instead it proposes a pre-ontological ethics of the relationship with the other which questions self-centred strategies of reflection.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; self-reflection; complicity; ethics; ontology; materialist historicism; Problem-Based Learning (PBL); Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Introduction

Due to its being rooted in positivism and post-Enlightenment humanism, higher education represents a modernist type of schooling which has long relied upon empirical pragmatism and the Cartesian tradition of knowledge (Burbules 1990, 2007). In this paper I will explore and analyse some tensions between these philosophical traditions and contemporary challenges brought by new pedagogies based on the philosophical concept of critical reflection. In what follows, I will argue that the post-Cartesian logic of reason still underpins the politics of schooling. Although postmodern education seeks to combat the old tradition and open pedagogy to disorder and difference, the universalist ethos of progress, causality and predictability stemming from the Enlightenment is still in force. When we think about contemporary academia as a political body, despite its varied embodiments under different Western democracies, we can observe that it is strongly involved in the politics of equality and sameness. In today's post-colonial era of liberating the conquered subjects from master narratives, the same overarching project of rationalising the advantages of criticism and self-criticism for the common good of society and its democratic ideals is still in circulation. In this project, critical reflection aims at perpetuation of the permitted ideologies, but very rarely at questioning them. Despite the efforts from individual educators who try to reject this politics in their everyday practice, the overarching educational ideology is

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still dependent on the Cartesian legacy of rationality, progress and history. The ties by which contemporary academia is bound under ideological systems have been analysed in many places (Giroux 1983, 1988, 1994; Giroux and McLaren 1989; Cherryholmes 1988; Barnett 1994; Jarvis 1992; Laurillard 1993; Szkudlarek 1993; Lyotard 1984; Bloom 1987; Bauman 1988, 1993; Phillips 1995; Readings 1996; Rorty 1982, 1989; Bourdieu [1984] 1996; Freire 1973; Gadamer 1992). Here I am interested in the problematics of ethics and history which mould the ontological ground for reflection in teaching and learning. In particular I will discuss the ethical predicament of ontology according to Emmanuel Levinas ([1961] 1969, 1991, [1998] 2006) whose concept of ethics will highlight the political and social obligation of academia. The historical conjunction will be analysed from the perspective of Robert Cox (1994, 1997) who investigates political systems as ethically bounded structures developing under certain spatial and temporal circumstances (Cox and Jacobson 1973; Cox and Sinclair 1999). I intend to focus on the polarised subject–object ontology which derives from the Greek tradition and still underpins the pedagogy of reflection and (self)-reflection in certain areas of educational methodology. Regarded as a mode of being by philosophy, reflection in education has become a methodological tool which, I argue, reinstates the same post-Kantian model of thinking that refutes freedom of criticism beyond the ideology which defines what criticism is or should be. I pose a question about the engagement of critical (self)-reflection with politics and how this relates to ethics. Following Zygmunt Bauman's (1993, 71) predicament that a description of any discipline lies in a mapping of its boundaries, I want to observe how the act of mapping, which itself is an intellectual commitment, presupposes the terrain of pedagogy understood as the politics of educational methods. What I hope to achieve is a critique of (self)-reflection which would transcend the traditional positivist approach to education based on the fixed identity of the unified subject. I will then employ a philosophical voice to comment on the current use of philosophy as a method in pedagogy, namely critical thinking, particularly within the method of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Personal Development Planning (PDP) which are premised on (self)-reflection (Dewey 1933; Freire 1973; Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985; Pollard 2002; Fook and Gardner 2007).

The 'Self' in self-reflection

In the context of academic pedagogy the question of who or what is the 'other' in the process of critical (self)-reflection seems politically and morally crucial. Under the present ontological paradigm, the 'other' of (self)-reflection mirrors the self, and consequently reproduces the ideology which introduced the need for, and politics of, (self)-reflection as a 'method' in academia. If it is to sustain its ethical value, the question about the other needs to be separated from philosophy of education. Within the boundaries of the education system (self)-reflection is only a tool of systemic reproduction, while the 'self', on which one reflects, becomes but metonymy of the educational system as a whole. If critical (self)-awareness is to be taught as a method of knowing (and being), the political meaning and the materialist-historicist context of this method has to be analysed. 'Transgressive materialism' from Cox and Levinas can serve to direct this analysis. Yet, as Levinas and Cox show, it is not acceptable to discuss this problem from the perspective of one knowing subject, such as the historicist's, or the critic's, the teacher's, or the student's. To (self)-reflect would mean, first of all, to see the question as posed in certain historical and

materialist circumstances, by particular stakeholders. Levinasian philosophy invites one to transgress the boundaries of the question and the discipline from which it emerges.[1] Arguing the limits, however, does not satisfy 'transgression', in the Levinasian terms, until it changes (self)-reflective thinking into action. By reflecting on the limits of (self)-reflection, one does not (self)-reflect yet. To achieve (self)-reflective 'advancement' one would need to abolish the conceptual foundations of (self)-reflection in the first place and challenge its pedagogical objectives. Under the current dominant pedagogy, however, we would not allow such results to happen. We would not accept, for example, a stream of consciousness instead of an essay, a charity action instead of a team project, a song instead of a structured presentation. Such endeavours are only possible on creative degrees which permit the unpredictable and the unconventional as part of their pedagogical programme. In consequence the question of how to teach and assess (self)-reflection becomes very urgent, especially among international communities of students coming to study in the UK, or students with learning difficulties, from different social groups, coming from different paths in life who all undergo the same criteria of assessment and the same mode of pedagogy (Dyke 2006). Those students who, by joining university, submit to it uncritically without an opportunity to change its system, have not reached a level of (self)-reflection. As Elaine Swan (2008, 393) argues, the effects of self-reflection are unpredictable and can be dangerous even for that one who self-reflects, let alone for the structure within which the process takes place. Is this why critical self-reflection has become a regulated method of teaching and learning in Higher Education?

Complicity and freedom

A methodological implementation of critical skills allows students and teachers to reflect on the whole structure of academic performance, such as the content or delivery of teaching and forms of assessment (Freire 1973; Cherryholmes 1988; Clift, Houston, and Pugach 1990). Taking this methodological procedure even further, academia encourages its participants to apply the effects of critical thinking to the student's own 'self', so that they can understand their own position in the world (Schön 1983). This realisation, however, is not aimed at transcending the completeness, or self-reliance, of academia. (Self)-reflection in its post-Kantian version is a political task which takes place within the borders delineated by the decision-makers, who situate the universal context of academia against the particular context of a student or a teacher. That it becomes an ethical task is discussed less, if at all, in academic circles, where ethics is just taught as a separate subject, but not as the foundation of teaching *per se* (Peters 1971; Kennedy 1997).

Levinas regards ethics as preceding any social and, more importantly, ontological order, while freedom is a state given to the subject, which does not need to be specifically recognised in a conceptual manner as 'freedom'. For Levinas, once freedom is thematicised as freedom it stops being an absolute freedom and escapes ethics. At the same time, what was later developed by Jacques Derrida and post-Marxists in a post-structuralist discourse of contingency (Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Chantalle Mouffe), was how the unlimitedness of choices and not giving a priority to any particular ethical discourse determines to a certain extent the horizon of infinity which reinforces freedom and our never being sure what to choose. Joanna Zylinska elaborates on this in relation to Ernesto Laclau's argument on contingency:

> Contingency already inheres an ethical injunction to choose, to make a decision. Even though Laclau acknowledges the limitedness of every 'context' in which we find ourselves, as if 'carved' from the horizon of infinity, he also recognizes that this limit-edness gives us a reason to choose and help us make a decision … The acknowledgement of this horizon of infinity, and of the fact that at no moment in time will we be able to grasp all the available options, makes Laclau advise vigilance towards our own position in the world. (Zylinska 2005, 18)

In education 'the vigilance towards our own position in the world' would respond to the method of (self)-reflection which, from a Levinasian point of view, should serve as a platform for questioning the conditions of selfhood. Yet what (self)-reflection does in fact is utilise the freedom of interpretation to secure the post-Kantian subject who never questions the rules of interpretation. Heideggerian 'being-in-the-world', which refuses to define reality from an abstract perspective, could be an answer to these limits of the subject who experiences life rather than investigates it. Yet the same subject is also trapped in the ontological sameness of selfhood which lives immersed in totality, consciously experienced through particularity.[2] In this discovery of Heidegger Levinas sees a return to Western philosophy:

> That which lives in the totality exists as totality, as if it occupied the centre of being and were its source, as if it drew everything from the here and now, but in which it is in fact placed or created. To it, the forces that traverse it are already assumed – it experiences them as already integrated into its needs and enjoyment. What is perceived by the thinking being as exteriority inviting it to labor and assume ownership is experienced by the living being as its substance, co-substantial with it, essentially immediate, an element and an environment. (Levinas [1998] 2006, 11)

This model gives priority to conceptualisation by the abstract *cogito* and standing outside of and prior to history and life. Hereupon, a 'search after truth' comes under 'production of knowledge' today formulated within the political boundaries of employability and the economic dimension of customer satisfaction (Bauman 1988; Bloom 1987; Veld, Fussel, and Neave 1996). In that sense the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for England makes the recommendations for a successful degree very clear:

> Generally, programmes prepare students well for future employment, especially where curricular content is relevant to employment, industry and students' career intentions. A key strength of many programmes is the opportunity for students to combine study for a higher education qualification with relevant employment, particularly through part-time programmes, work-based projects or work placements. A small minority of colleges have not made use of employers or external practitioners to develop or enhance their curricula, resulting in less evidence of currency in curriculum content. (QAA 2008b)

Lying within the compass of liberalism and the free market, the differentiation of disciplines, views, practices, ethics and forms of academic conduct do not surpass the circle of essentialist methodology but rather neutralises frictions between antagonistic forces (van der Marijk 1999; Jongbloed, Maasen, and Neave 1999; Mason 1998). It is the universality of knowledge produced under the umbrella of quality standardisation, validating consistency, quality as fitness for purpose, and quality as value for money (Harvey and Knight 1996), which has been formally accepted as 'the essential and identifying feature of academia' (Mori 2000, 14). Although many teachers try to oppose this politics by applying their own methods and exploring alternative pedagogy (Abercrombie 1970; Salzberger-Wittenberg and Osborne 1983; Lave and

Wenger 1991; Gadamer 1992; Jarvis 1992; Benson and Blackman 2003; Polachek 2006), their efforts, quite often with tools of the New Media, such as bloggings, chatting and networking (Rabikowska 2009) have to be finally encompassed by the ideology of academic standardisation and equality (Eraut 1994). Those features provide a framework for a use-value status of higher education with (self)-criticism being a pragmatic advantage. Non-traditional pedagogy drawing from postmodern theories, such as dialogism (Bakhtin, Gadamer), hermeneutics (Dilthey, Ricoeur) deconstruction (Derrida, Szkudlarek), pragmatism (Rorty) or interpretivism (Giroux) need to achieve more than encompassing pluralised identity. Yet in academia driven by the modern, linear approach to history and culture, education is situated in the stream of power where it is protected from contingency and unpredictability. It is embedded, for example, in radical democratic projects seeking to empower those from disadvantaged or socially dysfunctional groups. Inviting such groups to academia (often through intensive advertising and promotion), alongside different races, classes, sexual and religious orientations, with a whole new generation of youth brought up under postmodern economic and cultural conditions, becomes a political act whose consequences cannot be subordinated to the politics of universal good or an ethos of equal rights. In fact, asking the other to (self)-reflect should be defined in terms of politics and ethics in the first place.

Pedagogy of the loop

As has been said, this is a positivist order, originating from the natural sciences, which posits a separation of subject and object in search of universally valid laws which would smooth the functioning of the whole.

> Positivism is that school within philosophy of science which holds that the only means by which claims to knowledge about the world can be sustained is through an appeal to experience, observation, and testing. For the positivistic approach, a description of data collected from the empirically recognised sources lies in listing them and relating them to other value-free descriptions. Objectivity, method, and evidence have become the tools of conceptualisation and explanation undertaken from the inside of the investigated circle. (Cox and Sinclair 1999, 6)

The effects of such an approach are projected in the structures of educational curricula, administration and management organisation, as well as government and business-based research (Jackson 2000; Fuller 2000). Symptomatically, in the nomenclature generated under this approach, a process of dealing effectively with particular elements of the system is dubbed 'closing the loop'. From its initial focus on the improvement of the internal administration structure supporting the enhancement of teaching and assessment, 'the loop' expanded to the outside web of relations between the forces of academic oligarchy, state authority and market demand. The flow of information between these poles is steered and monitored by the stakeholders themselves who comply with the 'standardisation' of quality and performance 'across the board'. The operational techniques which enable an unobtrusive circulation lie in adaptation processes annihilating any potential discreteness. The problem is a fixed point of reference we all accept. Despite the structural divergence within recognition measures, teaching methods, research execution, resource allocation and exchange programmes with other institutions or countries, the same abstract reason conceptualises the role of academia from 'within' thus swallowing any ontological differences. On the outside

there are practical differences in methods, programme specifications, and pedagogical approaches, but they do not have the power to change the core of thinking about education. As Deleuze and Guattari ([1972] 2000, 40) indicate, in a capitalistic market those differences become epistemological simulations pertained in order to be imported as 'the partial bricks within the coexistence and the interaction of all the synthesis'. The effect is production and consumption of knowledge in compliance with internal and external audits, employers' panels, alumni liaisons, external examiners, and, of course, students' feedback. Confronting the reports from each side serves one purpose: to meet the demand of the educational system (Readings 1996).

PBL and PDP: post-modern methods trapped in positivism

Today, educational systems provide the evidence of life-involving, active, student-based, reflective methods of teaching and learning introduced in order to renounce the old 'rote' system of education stemming from the abstract intellectualisation of science (Ramsden 2003). These new activities, heralded in Great Britain in the 1990s, are oriented towards risk-taking, self-motivation, curiosity, self-directness, and the relevant use of resources (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 2008a). Significantly, these grew alongside the advent of new market-based economies. Under these objectives, it is particularly PBL which encourages active participation of a learner in education mainly by linking the learner's other experiences with the process of learning, and with PDP which is to document the (self)-reflective approach to the learning process.

Being originally related to vocational courses, PLB has become very popular and widely adapted across the humanities and sciences, and in some cases even on more traditional degrees, like philosophy or literature (Abercrombie 1970; Birch 1986; Colby 1986; Boud and Feletti 1997; Alavi 1995; Glasgow 1997; Wilkerson and Gijselaers 1996). Glasgow (1997, xxvi) explains PBL as an approach which requires students to 'acquire knowledge, information, and learning techniques and processes while working towards the solution of a problem, on an investigation, or toward the production of a product'. Most importantly, the PBL strategy, in response to the self-generating profusion of a market environment, aims to evoke reflection, self-motivation, and self-evaluation in order to enable students to adjust their current position to their future professional careers. By internalising life experiences, reassessing the usefulness of learning, and assessing their own learning (Saskatchewen Education 1988), students are expected to become independent learners ready to grasp the caveats of the changing society and the hyperactive market. The PBL approach perfectly illustrates how knowledge and experience overlap within the expectations and requirements of stakeholders: employers–students–teachers–society–authorities. The seven steps of PBL encourage a search for a solution with the following phases: (1) presenting a problem, (2) free discussion and analysis, (3) identifying relevant resources, (4) formulating objectives and applying research, (5) regrouping results and feeding back knowledge, (6) applying solutions in practice, and (7) mapping out a process of analysis within the area of empirical communication (Boud and Feletti 1997). It can be concluded that the problem-solving process, from ascertaining the problem in relation to students' experience through using resources in the available social and academic environment and applying the solution to their context (whether in real life or an academic assessment) enacts the design of a curriculum delineating the ground for action. Such an activity is enclosed in the same pattern of experience as that rooted in the market-led epistemology methods of teaching and learning endorsed by the

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008b). By including knowledge of society from employers, which is often necessary for the validation of programmes, universities adopt the market's status and 'sell' it back to society when students graduate. Acting in the loop, they all fertilise the socio-political and cultural background which influences the student's experience applied to the teaching and learning process, such as the PBL. In this transfer of knowledge and experience both teachers and students become passive performers of educational policies mushrooming under the umbrella of active learning, self-motivated learning, student-based learning and project-based learning which are embedded in degree programmes across all disciplines today. (Self)-reflection in this process lies in the interpretation by the subject of the overarching context from his/her subjective perspective, but without considering the aims and the mode of the process of interpretation itself.

As in the positivist model of reasoning, problem-solving guarantees the most effective solution justified by the given data objectively assessed within one paradigm. Insofar as it predicates the authority of the abstract reasoning in the datum-based purposive activity of tangible agents (e.g. in scientific laboratories, in accord with natural sciences), problem-solving theory justifies the reliability and complicity of general and political laws.

A tool to measure a degree of reflection upon students' performance has been introduced in distinctive forms by different departments which have to maintain a database of students' critical approach/skills. This can be part of a process of summative or formative assessment, or it can take the shape of a single assessment, such as a critical journal, critical essay, or reflective presentation. Additionally, in the last eight years, the measurement of critical skills has been formalised and standardised by the implementation of Personal Development Planning (PDP) in which students monitor and assess their own progress. According to the Dearing Report, PDP is 'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to *reflect* upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development' (QAA 2008a, emphasis added). The White Paper of 2002, *The Future of Higher Education*, already reinforced the issue of implementing PDP in 2003, hoping for its full realisation in 2005 by all universities in the UK. What PDP requires is for 'learners to understand and reflect on their achievements, and to present those achievements to employers, institutions, and other stakeholders' (QAA 2008a). Again, as in the case of PBL, the application of the self-reflexive approach, which underpins all educational strategies today, subscribes for the inner application of the effects of reflection acutely unaware of the limits of its context (students, employers, institutions, and other stakeholders).

As the above examples indicate, the reformed educational theory adjusted to the conditions of modern society incorporate 'life' and 'reflection' into the boundaries of the same ontological equilibrium which guarantees the smooth osmosis of data. Importantly, such an undisturbed circulation undergoes an ethical devaluation since it contributes to the normalisation of the totalising processes, in this case, transparency processes, documented in monitoring and moderating strategies ensured prior to the action undertaken by the actors. Consequently, the teaching–learning process falls into the manner of transmuting life experiences into a defunct collection of 'value-free' data. The transient state of time, place and culture becomes generally formulated and devoid of a possible rupture.

Although curricula enable individual decisions of both institutions and tutors as to methods of implementation, it is not possible to reject the nationally recommended

apparatus of educational theory employed by the institutions. There is, of course, an inner resistance and differentiation among performers of the national legislation, but it is not the actual versatility in tutors' performances which matters in a process of knowledge transmission. Naturally, delivery as such undergoes strict mechanisms of assessment (external and internal audits, peer reviews, students' evaluation), and is controlled according to its direct correspondence with the programme and school's official guidelines. A pedagogical strategy recommended for Higher Education predicts meeting the objectives at the end of each module according to the aims outlined at the beginning. Completing the curriculum requires teaching and learning to fit within the very strict framework of the module specifications. In this preoccupation with outcomes, certain knowledge is produced and later reapplied in the context of the balance between what is 'put in' and 'taken out', preventing deviation from the content in the process of reflection. From a historical point of view, the whole method 'takes the production process and the power relations inherent in it as a given element of the national interest, and therefore as part of its parameters' (Cox and Sinclair 1999, 96). By comparing the problem-solving theory investigated by Cox to PBL adapted by academia, it can be concluded that educational politics and positivist ontology merge on the grounds that events are conceived as an infinite series of objectified data. By 'putting them together on the table', as the PBL jargon puts it, the method does not leave space for a break in the system. Besides, such a result would not be apposite in the face of the method which the QAA employs for the system's sake. The apparent action inspired by life experience is reassured by the limits of the system in which the actual problem-solving action takes place. As Cox and Sinclair (1999, 5) put it, 'it is the action, not the limits of the system, that is the analytical focus of problem solving'. By scooping out particular problems and interpreting them in relation to the specialised areas of activity, PBL 'takes the world as it finds it' (Cox and Sinclair 1999, 88) and thus consequently reinforces a totalising approach in pedagogy.

The assumptions behind PBL reveal that 'life' works as empirical evidence for the relativity of knowledge which is channelled in the academic environment and reapplied in the working environment. An echo of the vitalist philosophy (Berlin 1976) that invites life as a condition to understand being, permeates this proposition. As was said before, 'being-immersed-in-being' does not guarantee knowing its limits. Likewise, a problem thrown into a classroom never breaks through the classroom's walls. PBL, alongside the positivist paradigm, protects the legislation of systematic education and guarantees a limited range of solutions. Although pedagogical underpinnings of the method are very positive on their own (they link the student with the external world and prepare the ground for change), they do not absorb the practical response from the student into the curriculum. The solution of the problem, even if achieved by means of new and unexpected research, does not affect the *episteme* of the whole, leaving the pillars of the educational system, such as the marking system, or disciplinary divisions, unaffected. At present, applying PBL, accompanied by self-reflective reporting in PDP reinforces the analytical approach to solving the practical crisis. As Bauman (1993, 21) argues in the wider context of the 'ideology of intellectuals', a legislatively oriented discourse of intellectualism contains in the imperative: 'a difficulty to be resolved theoretically *and* removed practically'. Bauman's emphasis on the simultaneity of the two directions designates the illusory condition of the 'problem' neutralised in the space of the method. In the enmeshment of thoughts and behaviours produced by the same ontological order, the act of conjunction of data turns into the act of commutation, subsequently preventing the possibility of reflecting on these

mechanisms from the outside order (that Levinas calls the pre-order) on which any emerging order is put into question. It has been argued in this paper that such a direction would have an ethical meaning, if it was practically realised by the students as part of their (self)-reflection.

Conclusions

Without a metatextual, or simply, a reflective overview of how totality comes to existence, it is not possible to understand how it works and how it comes apart. A contemporary approach to (self)-reflection addresses the metalanguage of objectivity, as such, and reinforces a position of historicist determinism which emphasises the equal participation of the historian in making history and the history that has made the historian (Carr [1961] 2001). Such an approach, although engaged in 'life', still seeks for universal laws and universal morality in a procession of events, while the meta-perspectives of Levinas and Cox ask for the individual awareness of the historical setting only to be recognised when disturbed by the effect of the confrontation of the aware subject with the object that awakes that awareness. In critical pedagogy, this would require a method of ethical (self)-reflection which entails asking about the point of reflection and, at the same time, asking about the position of those who ask.

In the light of the above argument, the responsibility of academia for the world's historical or ontological order is limited to the amount of freedom designated to it by that order. In this respect, the challenging criticism of teachers' ethical subservience from the author of the methodological guide on PBL, Neil Glasgow, seems to be insufficient. Glasgow (1997, xviii) admits that: 'We, as teachers, rely on others in education to define what experiences students should have and not to trust ourselves to look into the real world and identify what skill and knowledge are really required'. From my standpoint, that courage and independence, which Glasgow refuses to teachers, has been deified by the modern paradigm upon which teachers draw for their profession. Looking into the real world to see what it needs does not imply changing that world to make it need what we believe it should have. The same lack of value is criticised by Levinas when he questions the authenticity of Being asserted from the inside of the human mind, as well as by Cox in his critique of the uncritical positivist method of research. An ethics of teaching which focuses on how to reproduce a domineering system is bestowed on academia by a negative ideology. An ethics of looking into the real world and asking the question 'what skills and knowledge are really required' is motivated by a critical, and in that sense positive, ideology. Such an ideology is stipulated by an individual responsibility for the Other (Levinas 1991) and consequently for the 'real world'. As a result, (self)-reflection, applied to the teaching and learning process, would encourage an understanding of one's position in the whole, taking the whole as the object of criticism. However, to make further progress, it is important to bear in mind Bauman's statement that looking into the real world demands questioning the border of the world from which a reflective question is asked. Freed from the paradigm, the subject can see the world as other than himself, but not as a negation of himself, since their existence is dependent on each other.

Notes

1. Levinas's (1949) argument differs from traditional metaphysics mainly on the ethical ground that precedes any ontological concept of being: ethics here lies in an approach to being that starts in a meeting with the other. This approach requires abandoning of the

concept of the subject as posited against the object, or a particular being as recognised against a universal Being. Primarily Levinas draws upon Heidegger who introduced a new ontology by pointing at the relational connection between being and Being which laid foundation to the Levinasian later critique. Levinas, however, put his teacher's philosophy under scrutiny and criticised it for separating ontology from the eternal and for omitting the role of the other in our understanding of being. For Levinas, the Heideggerian project of the selfhood derives from a totalising dimension of the Same where being and Being (the equivalent of the existent and existence) are contained in each other and where ontological relationship emerges within the boundaries of an exclusive Selfhood. The immersion of being in Being before death has a different direction in Levinas: human existence (being) derives from a temporal relationship with existence (Being) as a prior condition of which we do not know anything until our realisation of the presence of the other. Levinas (2006, 5) writes: 'The other is a being and counts as such' whereas 'for Heidegger, to relate to beings *qua* beings means to let beings be, to understand them as independent of the perception that discovers and grasps them' (Levinas 2006, 5). What is crucial in the debate on pedagogy is this point of departure between the two philosophers which involves their different understanding of the relationship between the particular and the universal. Levinas (2006, 4) cannot accept that 'to understand is to relate to the particular, which alone exists, through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal'. Levinas does not appreciate metaphysical insight in reflection that returns to itself via a personal narrative about the relationship with the world. Reflection in Levinas (2006, 4) cannot be complacent with reflection on itself or existence, but instead on the other who conceives of the exteriority and enables thought. The very core of metaphysical reflection lies in that moment when 'thought becomes conscious of itself and at the same time conscious of the exteriority that goes beyond its nature, that encloses it'. See a detailed analysis of Levinas's argument against Heidegger in Chanter (1987) and a discussion by Derrida (1984). On the history of traditional metaphysics which supports subject–object oppositional relationship, see (Bader 1979; 1983; Habermas 1987). For a history of counter concepts in metaphysics including Levinas's ontological theory of anti-essentialism, see Coreth (1989).

2. The mythical meaning of the wholeness of society, Laclau (1990) argues in *New Reflection on the Revolution of Our Time*, where he admits that the impossibility of that fullness makes a desire to achieve it deeply ethical. In that sense, the interrelations between objects do not take place in time and place but they, in fact, create time and space. Where Laclau meets with Levinas and Cox is the conviction of the author of *New Reflections* that decisions are made on the ground of the *a priori* principle external to the decision itself. He writes: '[T]he Cartesian illusion of an absolute starting point must also be given up, since the person making ethical judgments is never an abstract individual, but a member of a certain community that already believes in a number of principles and values' (Laclau 1990, 243). Particular decisions, for Laclau, can be only made against the horizon of infinity which transcends the singular. Interestingly, for Laclau it is also the conceptualisation of time and space that has to be revisited if a social and historical making of society is to become a responsible/ethical process. Although clearly Newtonian in its principle, Laclau's strict divide between time and space brings about a new explanation of the social relations which take place within them. According to Laclau (1990, 84), spatiality on it own is impossible, 'any effort to spatialise time, ultimately fails and space becomes an event'.

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