

AUTONOMY, NOTION OF BEING AND ETHICAL EDUCATION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PAULO FREIRE AND RODOLFO KUSCH TO LATIN AMERICAN EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to contribute to the pedagogical process occurring in the classroom, both in teacher training courses typically offered at universities and in practical teaching as it unfolds in schools. As a preamble to the discussion, we start from the premise that when teachers and students enter a classroom, they carry with them a set of ideas, values, convictions, beliefs, etc., which guide their behaviors and choices, and give meaning to their lives. In this process, it is assumed that reality and educational issues must be addressed and resolved considering the history and existential particularities of the teachers and students who are the subjects of the educational process. This means bringing the themes of alterity and ethics into the field of education.

The school is not a space dedicated solely to transmitting contents, concepts, and theories as we want it to be; we need to consider other elements and aspects that drive the existence of each individual there. If a process has prevailed in which rational and epistemological capacity has set the guidelines, we must also consider that students and teachers are driven or at least moved by passions, feelings, and desires that we do not always know where, how and when they come from. In addition, students and teachers are bearers of values and attitudes that have been acquired over their lives, with the school contributing only in part, perhaps the smallest part. It is therefore within this horizon that the pedagogical process takes place, indicating the inadequacy of a position almost exclusively based on the epistemological dimension in the classroom.

Thus, from teacher training to classroom activities, the search for and transmission of truth have occupied a predominant space, leading us to question whether we should also approach alterity as an aspiration for ethical action, presenting it as a possibility to be worked on in the pedagogical process, and even as a solution to the problems that schools face in their daily routines. If we agree, epistemology, along with ethics, could be viewed as two sides of the same coin, or the same reality, in such a way as to facilitate a better understanding by teachers of themselves, their students, and the actions they undertake. Addressing the unpredictable, including the sensitive and passionate world in our pedagogical practice, can contribute to a broader and more integrated educational process.

The challenge we aim to address here is to problematize this predominance of the epistemological dimension in education, but also in other areas of knowledge where the human being is interpreted and regarded as a subject of knowledge capable of effectively performing their functions based on a faculty reserved solely for them—reason,

or *logos*. It is as if reason, understood or reduced to the idea of consciousness, could know everything. Consequently, students are often seen by teachers, and teachers by students, as purely epistemic beings guided by reason. However, I believe it is possible to go a bit further and deeper and recognize that we are not only epistemic *ser*. In the specific case of teachers, if they suspected from the beginning, that is, during their training courses, that we are not governed all the time by reason, perhaps we would have more just, friendly, affectionate, and autonomous interpersonal relationships in the classroom, as Paulo Freire advocated. And if we approached this issue from a place like Latin America, following the ideas of Rodolfo Kusch, we might be able to create a new critical, decolonizing, and intercultural pedagogy.

In conjunction with the ideas of these two Latin American thinkers, this chapter will explore the dialogue between epistemology and ethics. The goal is to contribute to both the understanding and the formulation of a pedagogy that redefines and considers the human being and the context in which they live.

AUTONOMY AND HUMAN FORMATION IN PAULO FREIRE

A cornerstone of Brazilian education, Paulo Freire was born in Recife on September 19, 1921, and died in São Paulo on May 2, 1997. Recognized as one of the major intellectuals of the 20th century, his contributions to the renewal of educational thought and practice are acknowledged worldwide. As an educator and philosopher, he authored a series of books and texts that continue to significantly influence the development of new approaches to human formation, including in schools. Critical of traditional pedagogy—teacher-centered, elitist, and epistemic—Freire proposed a humanistic education that considered individual problems, experiences, and the social context in which students were immersed. He believed that this process of conscientization was crucial for ensuring a transformative attitude against oppression and in favor of freedom and human autonomy. According to Freire, the technical and alienating education resulting from a “banking education” should be replaced by the possibility for students and individuals in general to think and act with political awareness, following and creating their own learning paths. For him, the pedagogical process is inseparable from action and ethical commitment.

One of his most well-known books, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), written in 1968 and banned in Brazil by the military dictatorship, exquisitely summarizes the journey

he had undergone in the preceding years, both in the field of popular education, where he focused on what he termed “the ragged of the world,” and in his experience as an exile in Chile, where he experienced the oppression of a political system that excluded human freedom from its horizon.

Arguing that the oppressed also need a theory to achieve freedom, Freire believed that human education must be linked to a process and a pedagogy that liberates individuals from the clutches of an oppressive and manipulative ideology, transforming the reality in which they live. This led him to develop a highly innovative literacy method in the early 1960s, inspiring educators, teachers, and social scientists from Latin America and Africa, and later from around the world. With this method, he aimed to counteract the traditional teaching system, based on primers and content that hindered the learning of reading and writing, where the most common practice was the repetition of isolated words that had no meaning for students’ realities. Fundamentally, the method followed steps intended to help students overcome their magical and uncritical view of the world, leading them towards a conscious, critical, and liberating attitude.

Finally, the transition from magical to critical consciousness does not occur naturally but is the result of a dialogical educational work that allows learners to interpret problems, set aside prejudices, experience freedom, and prepare for democracy.

Therefore, consciousness and literacy are closely linked, as the goal of an individual in becoming literate is not just to recognize letters, syllables, and be able to read a sentence. It is also to become a subject of their own history, engaged in political and cultural struggles (Brighente and Mesquida, 2016, p. 167). [Quote translated from its original in Portuguese]

In Paulo Freire’s view, human education is not neutral but rather a tool that problematizes, denounces, and challenges the logic of a social system aimed at integrating individuals into the interests of capital, thereby shaping them and restricting their ability to act freely as subjects of their own history. For this reason, he strongly opposes a formative process or pedagogy that eliminates any possibility of autonomous human action. Thus, an education that treats students as a mere empty space to be filled by the teacher is misplaced and subject to all criticism, since it transforms them into passive receivers, controlling their thoughts and actions, adjusting them to the world, and inhabiting their creative potential.

In this context, we can delve further into Paulo Freire’s ideas, particularly his conception of autonomy. Freire argues that respecting individuality, experiences, and

worldviews, and taking into account what each student brings to the learning process is fundamental to human formation and emancipation. As Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chauí explains, “autonomy means the right to govern oneself by one’s own laws or rules; independence; it refers to the path of those who are free or independent. Autonomous: that which is governed by its own laws, independent, self-directed” (Chauí, 2002, p. 496).

Freire’s final written and published work, *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1996), aims not only to define this concept but, more importantly, to propose a set of knowledge and practices that could be ensured in the pedagogical process to build students’ autonomy. Thus, it is understood as the capacity of individuals to act and make decisions through voluntary actions and considering their own reality. Autonomy, from an educational perspective as defended by Freire, aims to promote and transform the student into a conscious subject of their own historical and social condition. This conception seems to align with Kant’s context when he refers to the Enlightened individual.

Enlightenment [Aufklärung] is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere aude! “Have courage to use your own understanding!” -- that is the motto of enlightenment. [Aufklärung] (Kant, 1794, p. 100). [Translated quote from its original in Portuguese]

The enlightened and autonomous man is the one who has transcended their immaturity and, in contrast to their condition of heteronomy, that is, being guided by another or by rules different from their own, thinks, decides, and acts using their own reason and independently directs their choices and actions. (Zatti, 2007).

Without seeking a deeper alignment between Kant and Freire here, for the Brazilian educator, autonomy is connected to the idea of liberation from the oppressions of an unjust social reality brought about by the capitalist system. Autonomy would be the result of a process of awareness in which individuals cease to be treated as objects, becoming subjects who can and must intervene in the course of history and their own history.

In the classroom room, for example, the teacher must engage with students, being open and available to their curiosity; therefore, they

cannot adopt a rigid stance (..) It is precisely through their liberating pedagogical practice that the educator can combat the fatalism imposed by capitalist society, whether it be against unemployment, poverty, or high illiteracy rates. Education must not be the one that deposits, fosters mechanical memorization, or trains (banking conception), but rather the one that helps men and women, as subjects of history, to think critically, presenting challenges, providing space for their curiosities and inquiries (Brighente and Mesquida, 2016, p. 165). [Translated quote from its original in Portuguese]

For Paulo Freire, autonomy results in a human formation in which the individual is capable of exercising their freedom and self-determination, ceasing to depend on thoughts, norms, ideals, and projects that are not their own. The educator committed to such an education must be aware of the challenging transition from heteronomy to autonomy, helping students to “think correctly,” that is, moving from a state of passivity, submission, naïve curiosity, and common sense to a level of determination and epistemological curiosity, where they formulate their own knowledge and judgments (Freire, 1996, p. 16).

To be autonomous is to understand, confront, and overcome discourses and practices that seek to oppress, adapt, and “ideologically soften” individuals, leading them to believe solely in values, behaviors, and attitudes driven by the market ethic, grounded in profit where the freedom of commerce takes precedence over human freedom. Autonomy is an achievement that education must realize through a liberating pedagogical praxis that regards humans as unfinished, incomplete beings who need to be formed and humanized.

What I mean is that education, as formation, as a process of knowledge, teaching, and learning, has, throughout humanity’s journey in the world, become a connotation of its [own] nature, developing through history as a vocation for humanization (..) It means recognizing that we are conditioned but not determined (Freire, 1996, p. 11). [Translated quote from its original in Portuguese]

Thus, according to Freire, a pedagogy of autonomy must be grounded in ethics, respect for the dignity and autonomy of the learner, which requires the educator to practice listening—to engage in dialogue with students without authoritarianism or licentiousness, but by problematizing and supporting the construction of knowledge and the responsible and rational exercise of freedom. It is necessary to foster curiosity

and criticality in students that lead them to uncover and understand what is most hidden in the things and events they observe and analyze, without preconceived certainties that often imprison them and render them mechanical beings.

Listening is clearly something that goes beyond the hearing possibilities of each individual. In the sense discussed here, listening means a permanent availability on the part of the listener to be open to the other's discourse, gestures, and differences (Freire, 1996, p. 61) [Translated quote from its original in Portuguese]

As a consequence of becoming autonomous, the next step is to envision, as hope and utopia, a transformation of the world and society itself. This is where the ethical-political character of education lies. Thinking politically from an autonomous perspective is about reinventing the current world, which requires commitment and coherence from the educator and entails, in addition to knowledge of content, an effort to unmask the dominant ideology that immobilizes and hides truths. An autonomous educational practice demands taking a stance toward the world with the aim of transforming it, thereby overcoming heteronomous conditions.

Therefore, human formation is not solely epistemological, where the learner assimilates a set of knowledge developed and formulated over time, but also constitutes and requires an ethical stance, reflection, and conduct, as Paulo Freire explains:

The necessary promotion from naivety to criticality cannot and should not be done apart from a rigorous ethical formation [...] Men and women, as historical-social beings, have become capable of comparing, valuing, intervening, choosing, deciding, and breaking; for all this, we have become ethical beings. We are only because we are being. To be being is the condition, among us, of being (...) Therefore, to transform the educational experience into mere technical training is to underestimate what is fundamentally human in educational practice: its formative character. If we respect human nature, teaching content cannot be separate from the moral formation of the student. Educating is substantially forming (Freire, 1996, p. 18. *Grifo nosso*). [Translated quote from its original in Portuguese]

At various points in *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, Freire uses the term “being” precisely to illustrate the moving, unfinished, and incomplete nature of human existence and history, but also the ethical character of educational practice, with which it is possible to recognize human presence in the world as something original and singular. That is, more than being in the world, the human being has become a presence in the world,

with the world, and with others—always in the state of becoming. For the teacher, this means being open to students' inquiries, curiosity, questions, and inhibitions. This individual must be a critical and investigative being, restless about the task of teaching, rather than merely transferring knowledge. As Argentine philosopher and anthropologist Rodolfo Kusch also explains, being or becoming is a movement and a philosophical, political, epistemological, and ethical stance relative to a tradition and perspective that predominates in the conception of human beings, philosophy, science, and education in Latin America, marked by the presence and influence of Eurocentric thought, which is based on the idea of being, "*ser más*" (becoming more), or "*ser alguien*" (being someone) (Asprella & Gerónimo, 2017).

In Freire's framework, the concepts of "*ser más*" (becoming more) or "*ser alguien*" (being someone) are not predetermined a priori as an essential human essence that will inevitably be realized. Instead, they should be viewed as expressions of a human life in the process of becoming, allowing us to rebel rather than resign ourselves to offenses and violences that deny and destroy us. It is not in resignation, but in rebellion against injustices, that we affirm ourselves. This affirmative process, as an ethical-political commitment, unfolds through autonomy and freedom, in dialogical situations, and in formative moments where teachers and students share their ways of being in the world, without estrangement or distance.

I reduce the distance between myself and the harsh life of the exploited not with angry, sectarian discourses that are not only ineffective but also further complicate my students' lives. I reduce the distance separating me from their negative life conditions by helping them to learn, regardless of whether the knowledge comes from a machinist or a surgeon, with a view to changing the world and overcoming unjust structures, never with a view to their immobilization (Freire, 1996, p. 70). [Translated quote from its original in Portuguese]

In their studies, both Freire and Kusch, start from an ordinary thought, permeated by marginalized wisdom, revealing a richness and diversity of ideas, values, and knowledge derived from a deep relationship with the land and reality. This provides valuable contributions to a new perspective in the field of education.

ESTAR SIENDO³⁵ LATIN AMERICAN: THE CONTRIBUTION OF RODOLFO KUSCH³⁶

In Rodolfo Kusch's thought, the idea of *estar siendo* also plays a significant role, indicating both his critique of Western reason and the possibility of understanding and diagnosing Latin American culture, always from the perspective of mapping what is historically and culturally specific to the peoples of that other side of the world. Kusch seeks, among other things, to highlight the presence of a new thought rooted in manifestations of popular and American culture. If the hallmark of the West is to universalize its values, beliefs, and thoughts, perhaps we should practice delineating what is specific to us, particularly from the place where we are "*estamos siendo*," which is the Latin American continent.

Rodolfo Kusch was born on June 25, 1922, in Buenos Aires and died on September 30, 1979. He was the son of Germans settled in Argentina. He graduated in philosophy from the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1948 and conducted extensive field research on indigenous and popular American thought as the basis for his philosophical reflections.

To develop the notion of "*estar*" (being), "*estar siendo*", "*estar nada más*" (just being), Kusch argues that, while European-influenced rationalist thought dominated the establishment and interpretation of our culture, it is now necessary to deconstruct this logical structure, which is positioned as superior, to the detriment of the native and indigenous American cultures. At the core of his reflections is the idea that Western rationality is based on *ser*, the entity, the thing, while indigenous rationality would be based on *estar*, the domicile, and the habitat. Adopting methods of observation from anthropological science, he went into the field to deepen his intuitions to think and extract authentically American philosophy, concluding that indigenous peoples exhibit a unique ontological and epistemological situation characterized by the predominance

35 These terms are used in Spanish because it is the only language that offers two possibilities of existence: *ser* and *estar*. According to Kusch, "*ser*" refers to the ontological and essential dimension of existence, that is, the fundamental condition of being human. On the other hand, "*estar*" is the existential and temporal dimension, the way in which the individual relates to the world in determined situations.

36 This topic, with modifications, is part of a paper presented at the VIII Jornadas O pensamento de Rodolfo Kusch - territorialidades e interculturalidades: movimentos seminais na América Profunda, held in November 2018 at the Universidad Federal de Río Grande del Sur, in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

of “*estar*” over “*ser*”. European rationalist thought, by denying or completely dismissing American thought, turns it into a lifeless and historyless object, compelling us to build a movement of resistance and self-affirmation in the search for emancipation from discourses and practices that prevent us from expressing our own culture in an integrated and autonomous way.

In light of this diagnosis, fear is an emotion that must be acknowledged and fully experienced, as it offers us the opportunity to feel, experience, and contemplate our essence. For indigenous peoples, experiencing fear is not a problem, as it forms and defines them. This is in contrast to overseas philosophical techniques that seek to control and submit it to the dictates of reason, even adopting pedagogical perspectives. In other words, original Latin American thought does not require a technique or logic to guide it towards a knowledge that tells us how things are, aiming to grasp the “what” of things—their essential form. Instead, it seeks to approach the sense, meaning, content, and vital dynamics that drive the land, nature, and people.

The situation of intellectual thought versus ordinary thought seems symmetrically inverted. If in intellectual (Western philosophical) thought, technical aspects predominate, in ordinary thought, technical aspects take a back seat while semantic aspects dominate. In summary, if in ordinary sectors *something* is said, in intellectual sectors, it is about *how* [...] It is natural that there should be a correlation between “something” and “how” in discourse, but it is not natural for the two to diverge so significantly and for the “how” to be overvalued over the “something” [...] Returning to philosophy, the intrinsic problem of this activity is not merely technical, that is, the “how,” but also the “something” that constitutes it [...] Intellectual thought inverts the direction, focusing on the “how” rather than the “something” of the discourse (Kusch, 2000, p. 9-10). [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

For Kusch, a balance between content and form is necessary to de-fetishize the technique and logic that promises progress as a consequence and that has even marked bourgeois education by grounding teaching in the idea of progress and advancement, i.e., in a conception of reason that considers everything susceptible to being dominated, controlled, and predicted.

One faces chaos to find what is predictable. And to ensure this, techniques are used. This wastes time because it removes the possibility of novelty. The fear that what appears might be something different is lost. Thus, our

education. We educate young people to pre-vision, to see before, to already know what is given, and thus stop time, avoiding the burden of sacrifice (KUSCH, 2000, p. 12). [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

Desde esta perspectiva, lo que se ha visto en América sería un gran desnivel entre lo que este continente era y lo que el Occidente trajo. Por un lado, el inferior, el inútil y, por otro, el superior y el útil, que tiene como objetivo el progreso, el ascenso, el ser alguien, no importa a qué costo y a qué precio.

To be someone implies the desire to be so and that desire is identified, in this context, with progress, with the substitution of fruits for (the accumulation of) simple things, with the obsession of adding objects. Thus, the perfection of ser ultimately implies having [...]. The individual seeks perfection, which is identified with an infinite desire for progress related to objects, a progress that implies the denial of the old desire for a minimum that simply sought to preserve life, committed to mere estar (Cullen, 2003, p. 53). [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

The Latin American person, formed, educated, and influenced by this European worldview, cannot endure fear and existence, as it causes anxiety, unlike the indigenous person who, when feeling fear, sought help from shamans. For them, embracing our human dimension means living at the level of the earth and confronting our fears. For us, this is not enough because we want everything to be clear, elucidated, and susceptible to understanding by reason. It is as if there were an imperialism of rationality that actually reveals our weakness and impotence in facing the totality of what we should think and live. We are incapable of conceptualizing thought in Western terms because we want to reduce everything to a cause-and-effect relationship.

[...] What we call culture does not provide us with a total knowledge [...] Culture, in daily life, assumes knowledge from books and data just as in science. The best example is the library. Entering it, we always feel our inferiority in the face of so much knowledge poured into the book object. We continue to live the scientific encyclopedia at the level of culture [...] The accumulative knowledge present in education and crystallized in the library is seen as an advantage of the century [...] What is called culture in the 20th century is thus reduced to mere fetishism (Kusch, 2000, p. 21-22). [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

Given this context, we can observe a dual polarity in our Latin American society: on the one hand, or “*estar nada más*” (just being), or “*estar siendo*” and, on the other hand, or “*ser alguien*” (being someone) according to Kusch’s expressions, or simply “*ser más*” (becoming more) a priori, as Paulo Freire suggests, being deprived of our presence in the world. We seem accustomed to accumulative, quantitative, competitive, and encyclopedic knowledge—partial and incomplete—because we, things, and the world are more than what is conceptually defined, a scope that no philosophical, scientific, or pedagogical technique can fully capture.

This idea of merely being in the world (“*estar nada más*” (just being), “*estar siendo*”) whether as a characteristic of American culture or as a critique of Western reason, as Kusch proposes, invites us to revisit the history of philosophy itself and observe the effects of the hypervaluation of reason at the expense of other human dimensions, such as passion.

From Kusch’s perspective, disregarding human passions, such as fear for example, as a counterpoint or alternative to reason or being, is to undervalue an original state that needs to be examined in its uniqueness and depth. To do this, we must consider the ground we inhabit, which supports life and provides spiritual sustenance. Culture must have a margin of rootedness and be considered as situated in a geographical space. From the ground emerges an entire culture and a way of being, thinking, acting, and speaking—a true ethos. Hence, the idea of creating a geoculture for Latin American people and reclaiming the philosophical dignity of indigenous American worldviews.

Behind every culture is always the ground [...] And this ground, as stated, which is neither a thing nor a touch, but weighs heavily, is the only answer when one asks about culture. It symbolizes the margin of rootedness that every culture must have [...] There is no other universality than this condition of being grounded, whether it be in the highlands or the jungle. Hence the rootedness and, more critically, the necessity of that rootedness, for without it, life loses its meaning (Kusch, 2000, p. 109-110).
[Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

Therefore, the ground, passions, fear, emotions, the here and now, the flow of our lives, magic, and the symbolic are central characteristics for understanding and conceptualizing the uniqueness of Latin American culture. It is the “*estar siendo*” as an existential structure and cultural decision. Unlike “*ser*,” which defines, colonizes, and refers to essence, “*estar*” marks and indicates the condition, the external mode of all that exists (being), without concern for interiority, universality, and immutability.

According to Kusch, the American symbolic horizon highlights the predominance of “*estar*” or “*estar siendo*,” which implies more than what *ser* states or says; it is pure living, being domiciled, and “attached to a ground considered inalienable” (Kusch, 2000, p. 238). By neglecting this, we reveal our own lack of authenticity. “Our authenticity does not lie in what the West considers authentic, but in developing the inverse structure to such authenticity, in the form of “*estar siendo*” as the only possibility [...] Only the recognition of this will grant our authenticity” (Kusch, 2000, p. 239).

This means, as Kusch explains, that in Western cultures, and as is clearly manifest in America, “*ser*” has overshadowed “*estar*,” conquering and colonizing it. However, the trajectory of “*estar*” merges with the chaos of a world that is distressing, a “world that is as it is” and must be contemplated and lived, not merely in terms of progress and scientific explanations.

While the European world of *ser* has seemingly resolved the issue of hostility and fear through theory and technique, the American world of *estar* does not transcend reality but invokes it, placing itself in front of it. Whereas the West creates science and education to oppose and confront fear—what we might call passions—the indigenous peoples remain in their “magic,” their rituals, preserving the reality of the world, interacting with nature and taking the best out of it with deep respect.

Therefore, a critical and Latin American pedagogy, as presented by Kusch, must include and consider the human being in its always unfinished relationship with the ground, that is, in its existential dimension of culture, which is transient, uncertain, if we are to achieve its realization and, according to him, our own mission in America. This presupposes the field of possibilities of “*estar siendo*,” as Paulo Freire also proposed.

THE QUESTION OF ESTAR, AUTONOMY AND EDUCATION: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF ALTERERITY

To conclude these reflections, we would like to emphasize that the ideas of Paulo Freire and Rodolfo Kusch enable us to engage not only with the Latin American historical context but also with the philosophical and educational tradition from which we are heirs. This engagement aims to confront and overcome this tradition in pursuit of an education oriented towards an ethics of alterity. As we have seen, the notions of *autonomy* and *estar siendo* serve as parameters that can help us, on one hand,

understand the process of domination and disrespect endured by indigenous and oppressed peoples throughout the history of America, and on the other, overcome the dualistic and Manichean view that is often adopted in the educational process. In the first case, the colonizing project disregarded and devalued existing cultures, customs, and traditions in the name of a conception of humanity and the world from elsewhere, namely Europe. In the second case, indigenous or aboriginal peoples were classified as barbarians, distant from civilization, and therefore required education and conversion. It was as if there were a human essence that needed to be taught, assimilated, and internalized by those inhabiting the American soil. This perspective seems to still prevail in current educational projects.

It seems to us that Freire and Kusch specifically opposed this practice. In his text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Freire argues that human beings are products of their history, meaning that there is no room for essentialisms; in other words, the human subject is not conceived as something predetermined *a priori* and by nature. On the contrary, the oppressed must be educated from within their own culture, ethos, and way of *being in the world*, not from a model of the human subject given and imposed by the oppressor. Therefore, the autonomy of the oppressed is not built through a process of identification, reproduction, and internalization of the oppressive image and consciousness, but through the search and historical realization of their authentic subjectivity from a humanistic and liberatory pedagogy.

The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and liberating pedagogy, will therefore have two distinct but interrelated moments. The first, in which the oppressed discover the world of oppression and commit, in practice, to its transformation, and the second, in which, once the oppressive reality has been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to be of the oppressed and becomes the pedagogy of people in a state of permanent liberation (Freire, 1972, p. 35). [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

The oppressed themselves, with their emotions and fears, should be the protagonists of their own path to liberation and self-reflection. Similarly, although in another historical context and from another starting point, Kusch also seeks to understand in depth the process of domination and exploitation of peoples, especially indigenous peoples, in the Americas. However, this understanding cannot be based on a mere classification, where indigenous peasant culture is on one side and Western European culture on the other: barbarism and civilization. Referring to the formation of Argentina, Kusch believes “this classification is outdated. It was useful in the early years of our national formation and had been proposed by a positivist and liberal generation that honestly

aimed to incorporate our nationality into the congress of nations” (Kusch, 2007, p. 201-202).

As Paulo Freire looked at Brazil in the 1960s and Kusch at Argentina of his time, we must now consider the cultural guidelines into which individuals are inserted. The peasants of northeastern Brazil and the indigenous peoples of the Andean highlands must be educated and formed based on their own culture and way of life, built and guided through a long historical process. The positivist attempt to find a synthesis between civilization and barbarism generally indicates a desire for superiority of the former over the latter. In this process, the barbarian—the indigenous person, the peasant, the oppressed, the black person, etc.—is considered an other who needs to be overcome and educated according to civilizational standards. In the colonizing view, being good and being a citizen means conforming to the civilized world. Kusch cites the example of a shaman who performed a very important ritual when sending his son to study at a military school, or when a neighbor in Maimará was very happy to send her son to study in Tucumán. In both situations, there was a manifestation that the children were overcoming their state of barbarism. Was that necessary? Is it the only synthesis to be made? No, Kusch replies.

Certain Quechua communities in Bolivia want to establish their own university in Quechua. Evidently, there is no need for us to be troubled; we want to seek a synthesis, and the people are experimenting with different approaches [...] What is going to happen will not depend on us, the wise ones who are so concerned about the future and the past, but on those who are not wise, perhaps the Bolivian shaman, my neighbor, in short, whether we like it or not, on those who are educated according to other cultural guidelines. The solution might emerge when the educated from one side, that is, the good [the civilized], who suffer from pride and anxiety, talk to those others (Kusch, 2007, p. 203). [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]

Therefore, synthesis is not a matter of one being superior to the other, but the result of a deep dialogue, leading to a total authenticity of the participants. When this authenticity is exerted “one discovers the human in all its degradation as the humble, finite and discouraged person who timidly rehearses his culture and sometimes adds, as a substitute, a clumsy pride because he believes himself to be very good” (Kusch, 2007, p. 204).

As can be observed, both thinkers place significant emphasis on the issue of alterity. Their reflections on autonomy and *estar siendo* lead us to consider an education that takes the other into account. For Paulo Freire (1996), the teacher must respect the

student's right to be curious and restless, their aesthetic tastes, concerns and fears, language, values, beliefs, and symbols. It is in this sense that true dialogicity—where dialogical subjects learn, grow, and respect differences—is revealed, as they are being and acting autonomously, as beings who, unfinished, assume themselves to be radically ethical and historical (Freire, 1996, p. 31).

Kusch also acknowledges an alterity that has been obscured, exploited, oppressed, and exterminated in Latin America. There is a process of denying the deeply rooted nature of the culture of Latin America's indigenous peoples, their dignity, their history, and their ways of living, coexisting, and inhabiting the land where anything is possible. In its modern inception, the "New World" was marked by invasion, imposition, and violence, all in the name of progress and an unmeasured "*ser alguien*" (being someone). All those native peoples—Aztecs, Mayans, Aymaras, Incas, etc.—were stripped of their unique historical identities and defined as inferior, primitive, and epistemologically archaic.

While there may be differing viewpoints and perspectives on developing a philosophy of education and a humanizing pedagogical project (GIULIANO, 2008), it is evident that Paulo Freire and Rodolfo Kusch are aligned in their analyses and studies of a historical and geo-cultural reality of domination, denial, and extermination. Both sought to understand and conceptualize an America shaped by political, economic, social, and cultural practices, as well as epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic conceptions grounded in notions and references formulated in other contexts, disregarding the problems, particularities, and tensions inherent to our territory.

Therefore, it is high time to consider a Latin American education that includes the other, moving towards a more just, tolerant, and respectful world. The different, the excluded, is not a threat but an opportunity to build a new identity, new connections, and a new way of coexistence. To this end, it is essential that we revisit the topic of alterity or the issue of the other in depth. To conclude this chapter, we will offer a brief observation on the subject to stimulate future discussions.

It can be observed that the philosophical tradition has not addressed the issue hege- monically. From its inception, alterity as an ethical issue has been secondary, especially when viewed from a Eurocentric perspective. Today, it is increasingly acceptable to consider that philosophy is not confined to the Greek world, and thus, it may be necessary for us to reposition ourselves regarding ethics and what it constitutes. Indeed, since the Greeks, depending on the school of thought, the issue of alterity has been present, at least by exclusion and as a conceptual and epistemic representation.

In this regard, when Parmenides asserted that being is and non-being is not, one can discern, *ex negativo*, an early notion of what has gained unprecedented relevance in contemporary Western thought. In Parmenides' proposition, "non-being," the other, only acquires "existence" in relation to a "self" that totalizes and represents reality. The only chance for the other to exist is when it is reduced to or becomes similar to this self. Over time, this conception seems to have become hegemonic, essentially becoming a customary and unquestionable representational practice. In the specific case of human beings, we have the idea and conception that we are alike and that all other individuals are similar to me, that is, there is a human essence that extends and is present in each one of us; we would be of the same species.

At the beginning of modernity, this idea manifested through the notion that we are all equal, with equality emerging as the solution to conflicts in a hypothetical state of nature, where there was "a war of all against all." To prevent mutual extermination, it was necessary to establish a contract and create an institution to effectively control and preserve each individual's life and, by extension, everyone's. Thus, the modern state was born with the function of guaranteeing equality among all.

At the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the figure of the other, or rather, the issue of alterity, acquired a new meaning. Not similar nor equal, but different. This is the leitmotif of an emerging debate, provoking new attitudes and perspectives for human coexistence. By forgetting to consider the other as another and now placing them at the center of our practices, the issue acquires new meaning and becomes a subject for a new field of reflection: ethics.

Ultimately, both Paulo Freire and Rodolfo Kusch seem to adopt this perspective in their analyses and reflections. For them, as I understand it, a liberating education committed to the history of Latin American peoples must be essentially ethical, as it would be quite regrettable to disregard the other, the different, and only treat them as subjects to be excluded, oppressed, and denied. In line with Levinas' views, they agree that the other is not an abstract concept or a category of thought but has a face that reveals itself and must be welcomed and recognized. "The epiphany of the face as face opens up humanity. The face in its nakedness presents to me the plight of the poor and the foreigner" (Levinas, 2000, p. 190). To think, recognize, and embrace the face of America is to undergo this epiphanic experience, in which the other manifests as someone unique, singular, and different. The other is no longer a stranger but has become our *neighbor*. Their presence within me is a call that cannot leave me indifferent to their fate. This appears to be the commitment and call that our two Latin American thinkers are making and proposing, including in the field of education.

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