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## **THE ETHICAL-POLITICAL POTENTIALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PRESENT: ARISTOCRATIC PRINCIPLE *VERSUS* DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE**

*El potencial ético-político del presente educativo:  
principio aristocrático versus principio democrático*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper will explore a Sophist tradition of educational thought, which is concerned with the world and not a sphere of ideas as distinct from the world, and to suggest some central distinctions and concepts following from such tradition today. The distinctions which are discussed are between; upbringing, schooling and education; aristocratic *versus* democratic principle of education; aristocratic *versus* democratic conception of nature; and, culture as static *versus* culture as *praxis*. Equality is highlighted in the paper as a central concept for democracy as well as education and are discussed through Jacques Rancière. The distinctions established will also make clear what is at stake if we consider educational thought as conditional for democracy and a liveable life for anyone. The contrast between the aristocratic

principle and the democratic principle for education will centre on conceptions of violence and nonviolence, in accordance with Judith Butler and Franco «Bifo» Berardi's analyses. In a final paragraph the paper discusses how equality play out in relation to teaching, and the discussion is extended by exploring Judith Butler's conception of 'grievability'. The paper concludes by suggesting that education is the ethical-political potentiality of a new beginning within the present order of things, and therefore the very *praxis* of change of this order, and therefore what makes *paideia* possible in the first place.

*Key words:* equality; Rancière; Butler; educational principles; democracy; violence; schools.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo explorará una tradición sofista de pensamiento educativo, que se ocupa del mundo y no de una esfera de ideas distinta del mundo, y sugerirá algunas distinciones y conceptos centrales que se derivan de dicha tradición en la actualidad. Las distinciones que se discuten son entre: crianza, escolarización y educación; principio de educación aristocrático *versus* democrático; concepción aristocrática *versus* democrática de la naturaleza; y cultura como estática *versus* cultura como *praxis*. La igualdad se destaca en el documento como un concepto central para la democracia y la educación, y se discute a través de Jacques Rancière. Las distinciones establecidas también dejarán claro lo que está en juego si consideramos el pensamiento educativo como condición para la democracia y para una vida digna para todos. El contraste entre el principio aristocrático y el principio democrático de la educación se centrará en las concepciones de violencia y no-violencia, de acuerdo con los análisis de Judith Butler y Franco «Bifo» Berardi. En un párrafo final, el documento analiza cómo se desarrolla la igualdad en relación con la enseñanza, y la discusión se amplía explorando la concepción de Judith Butler de «*grievability*». El artículo concluye sugiriendo que la educación es el potencial ético-político de un nuevo comienzo dentro del actual orden de cosas y, por tanto, es la *praxis* misma del cambio, siendo así también lo que hace posible la *paideia* en primer lugar.

*Palabras clave:* igualdad; Rancière; Butler; principios educativos; democracia; violencia; escuelas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will explore four distinctions to arrive at a preliminary definition of education within what I will call a Sophist tradition of educational thought read through Werner Jaeger's volumes on *Paideia* (I, 1939, and II, 1943) among others,

and to suggest some central distinctions and concepts for such tradition today.<sup>1</sup> Such exploration is also inspired by the pragmatists and especially Richard Rorty (1980) and John Dewey (1966), the latter for whom Jaegers reading of the Sophists expose «the fact that the stream of European philosophical thought arose as a theory of educational procedure.» (p. 331).

I understand ‘tradition’ in the way McIntyre (1977) talks about tradition (in Bernstein 1983, p. 77; McIntyre, 1977, p. 461), as multiple of narrations over time, necessarily running into contradictions by being retold over and over again in different circumstances and in relation to different issues, and therefore in need of being constantly rethought, and put into use to be meaningful. The idea is not to find the correct account of a Sophist tradition of educational thought but explore what can be done in the world currently under its spell.<sup>2</sup>

In a way this paper strives to demystify educational thought, which all too often ends up in a sharp divide between experience on the one hand and theory on the other, sometimes expressed as the distinction between theory and practice, or between thought and action. I will rather suggest that education is precisely the critique of such distinctions, and emanate from somewhere else than in the, for philosophy, foundational separation between world and thought (Rorty, 1980).

This is a somewhat playful paper, but playful in the way children play, on the border between fiction and real, that is as addressing a serious matter at the same time as the imagining of what that matter can be is without limit: It is not utopian thinking, it is rather an exploration of the limit itself. Maybe taking the attitude of, what Rorty (1980, p. 370) calls an edifying philosopher:

Edifying philosophers want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometime cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which was *not* an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described.

1. I explore Jaegers reading of the early Sophists because he reads them from within a tradition of educational thought (as distinct from philosophy) and his work can therefore not only be understood as ‘original’ but also be understood as exemplary within such tradition. Jaegers volumes on *Paideia* are continuously referred to in intellectual history, see for example Arendt 1959, 2005; Dewey, 1966, and Rorty, 1980.

2. It seems particularly difficult to read the Sophists beyond the authority of Plato’s critique of them, beyond the dominant interpretations from within disciplines such as rhetoric and/or political philosophy, and strangely enough, also from within some strands of education. I am not challenging those readings directly, but simply suggesting one more reading. This time from *within* the Sophists tradition of educational thought and practice.

Or rather, as will be explored in depth in the paper, taking an educational point of view, since I do not think, as Rorty does, that «education sounds a bit too flat.» (p. 360), but rather as that which makes an edifying philosophy makes sense.

An edifying philosopher says Rorty «would like simply to offer another set of terms, without saying that these terms are the new-found accurate representations of essences (e.g. of the essences of ‘philosophy’ itself).» (p. 370). That’s why, I think it is appropriate to return to the Sophists introduction of educational theory, since such theory is pre-Plato’s division of world and thought. Or with Rorty’s own words: «We shall, in short, be where the Sophists were before Plato brought his principle to bear and invented ‘philosophical thinking’...» (Rorty, 1980, p. 157). That is, this paper is to explore educational thinking emanating from the Sophists and, as far as possible, as unaffected by Platonic style theory «of the absolute difference between the eternal and the spatio-temporal.» (Rorty, 1980, p. 307). Rather, the following will make problematic how such an idea of a separate space of ideas from the world, and understood as eternal, when applied to certain political realities of today, will have some serious consequences for the very possibility of education and democracy to take place at all.

Such line of thought which I am to follow through the paper, in other words, emanates from not accepting Plato as the final word on the Sophists: «We must not depend on Plato’s account of them: for the point at which he constantly take issue with them is not their knowledge, but their claim to teach *areté*, their connexion with life and conduct.» (Jaeger, 1939, p. 294). I can’t stress this enough; it is the idea that *areté* can be taught that makes Plato constantly criticise the sophists, not their knowledge. For as a fact «They [the Sophists] were inventors of intellectual culture and of the art of education which aims at producing it.» (p. 293). I do not accept, as some has claimed, that the importance of the Sophist for educational thought should be judged on the basis that Sophists teachers were paid to teach (which is a critique, or rather complaint, Plato has, see Jaeger, 1939, p. 297), while we at same time overlooking the basic fact that the universe of Plato is anti-democratic and therefore anti-educational to its core, and that his ideal state is as Arendt says «inhuman» (2005, p. 37). In his republic everyone has his place already according to a strict hierarchy, motivated by access to the eternal space of ideas; it is an Aristocracy (see Bloom, 1991). Plato’s’ philosopher, says Arendt (2005), «establishes himself, basis his whole existence on that singularity which he experiences when he endured the *pathos of thaumadzein*. And by this he destroys the plurality of the human condition within himself.» (p. 37). What he destroys, is the possibility of difference and pluralism, which is a condition for both democracy and education. Also, interesting if not decisive for my position in this paper, the Sophists were not coming from the elite, they were not of noble heritage as Plato himself, but of

more modest origin (Jaeger, 1939, p. 297). They would simply need to get paid to do what they did, to be able to teach.

What is more important I think though, is that the Sophists made education possible as *change* for *anyone*, in principle, in that *areté* could be taught, and not be inherited by blood (Jaeger, 1939, pp. 287-288), as well as made *equality* central for the political world as well as nature («Euripides describes equality, the foundation of democracy, as the law, manifest a hundredfold in nature...», Jaeger 1939, p. 324), and regarded equality as the foundational concept for the democratic organisation of the city-state (pp. 321-322). It would be hard to call Plato a democrat, regardless of his impact on western thought in other matters, and regardless of his sense of humour (Rorty, 1980, p. 369, n15) which made his suggested Republic more ambiguous in meaning than what often is claimed. Since my concerns in this article are about education, equality and democracy (as a response to the plurality of the human condition as Arendt, 2005, says) the choice of which tradition to start in when thinking those concepts is not a hard one, since the Sophists are the «Greek philosophers and educational theorists, starting from the educational experience of democracy.» (Jaeger, 1939, p. 288).

Educational thought is the foci of my exploration, which I will imagine new, or again, through taking the pre-Platonic point of the Sophists, and by suggesting four distinctions and a preliminary definition making sense of such tradition of *educational* thought today. That also means that my article as a whole can be understood as an example of such tradition at work.

I will also use the distinctions established to make clear what is at stake if we consider educational thought as the Sophists did, as conditional for democracy<sup>3</sup> (Jaeger, 1939, p. 286) and a liveable life (Butler, 2015; Säfström, 2018) for anyone, and as basically concerning the worldliness of the world here and now. I will discuss equality (Rancière, 1991), as a central concept for education, as it was for the Sophists<sup>4</sup>, and particularly how equality play out in relation to a conception of teaching within this tradition of thought I am exploring. I will extend the discussion on equality and teaching by also exploring Butler's (2020) argument on the equality of grievability and nonviolence, as such conceptions tends to promise an extension of equality beyond only concerning humans (Säfström & Östman, 2020) and the

3. Here I refer particularly to two of the greater Sophists Protagoras (481-411 b.C.) and Euripides (485-406 b.C.), who both of them were devoted democrats (see Jaeger, 1939, pp. 322-324, where this is made clear).

4. Not only were the Sophists democrats, for which equality is the central concept, they also believed that anyone could be taught *areté*, again, that distinguish them from Plato's Aristocracy, and makes education a central praxis for democratic culture.

integration of the ethical with the political, which for the Sophists was a true sign of *paideia* (Jaeger, 1939, p. 300).

## 2. UPBRINGING, SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION

The first distinction is between «upbringing», «schooling» and «education» and I will discuss them shortly, each in turn. I suggest that we do not consider upbringing as primarily, or exclusively an educational concept, but rather as fundamentally designating the relationship between a parent and a child. That is, «upbringing» is what parents do to their children, and gets its meaning through love, in its fullest meaning. Upbringing tends to be given meaning through parental love, or the lack of it. A person who has been loved being brought up, and who knows this, tends to be able to make multiple new social relations and to extend them (Butler, 2019). And the other way around, if a person has not experienced parental love, by whoever fulfils the role of parent, such person tends to have difficulties with social relations and to sustain them (Farley, 2014).

Much more can be said about the importance of love for social relations but here I will just suggest that education is not in this way defined through love, but rather through a commitment to the other, that is through an ethical-political rather than psychological contextualisation of social relations (Säfström, 2020b). A relation, to be educational love is not necessary in the same way as it is for upbringing. For example, one does not need to love the student, but one needs to be committed to him or her, to establish a relationship that is based on an interest in the freedom of him or her to be concerned with education (Biesta & Säfström, 2011; Biesta & Säfström, 2018).

«Schooling», as I understand the term (Säfström, 2011b), points to the interests and desires of an institution to incorporate an individual in the social order, in which the place and role of the individual are defined by that order.<sup>5</sup> It is to *socialise* the individual, incorporate her or him into a web of meaning, to inhabit certain values, norms and conducts of behaviour appropriate for the social sphere in question, for the person to be able to both being a member of that social context as well as realising oneself within that particular web of meaning. It makes the individual life meaningful as well as establishing the social as such (Durkheim, 1956). In addition to socialisation, as Biesta (2006) has pointed out, schooling is also to *qualify* the individual, for him or her to be able to take one's place in the division of labour in the social sphere of work and leisure. Even though, as Biesta

5. For Ian Hunter (1994), this order of the school, or what I have called «schooling», is a construct built on a multiplicity of discursive constructs over time, of layers of bureaucratic governance and subject forming techniques of pastoral care.

(2006, 2010) has claimed, one needs to understand socialisation and qualification as part of a tension within education itself, pointing towards different 'aims' and 'spheres' of education, and as not possible to separate from a third aim and sphere, that of subjectification, I would still for reasons of my exploration exclude socialisation and qualification from education to get to the heart of educational thought.<sup>6</sup> It is a necessary step to be able to clarify educational thought, as not already being associated with different disciplines and areas of thought which understand education basically as an object to which theory of one or another sort is applied (Säfström & Saeverot, 2017).

I will in his paper rather perceive educational theory as the context in which objects, as well as relations between objects and subjects, take shape and form. That is, *education* is directed to, and embraces the world. Still, subjectification is central to education also in the ways I want to discuss it here. With subjectification is meant according to Biesta (2006, 2010), how a subject can say *no*, to distinguish him or herself as *someone* rather than being reduced to *something*. Subjectification is the process in which the subject avoids objectification concerning «the desires and directions of others.» (Biesta, 2017, p. 28). Schooling, as I am defining the concept, is an systematic institutionalization of the desires of a certain state, to give directions of others, to mould the individual following a certain police order, as Rancière (1999, 2007) says, to be schooled as an individual of a certain type and shape. Instead, the individual takes his or her place in the world as a subject. In Rancière's (1991) theoretical universe, being able to withdraw one's intelligence from «the land of inequality» (p. 90), is to dis-identify (p. 98) with an order of the society in which inequality is reproduced through schooling (Säfström, 2020b), and instead claim one's equal intelligence with everyone else (Rancière, 1991, p. 133). For Biesta (2017), subjectification demands *emancipation*. For Rancière: «One need only learn how to be equal [...] in an unequal society.» (p. 133) to be emancipated.

I would like to reconnect to Jaeger's (1939, 1943) readings of the educational theory of the Sophist, and with them understand education as expressions of certain ways to move within the world here and now and to embrace their conviction that *areté* could be taught to anyone, and their opposition to teaching as reproduction of an imagined essence of the elite. As such, making culture common rather than exclusive, changeable rather than fixed, and therefore essentially establishing education as an ethical/political concept concerned with and operating in the world.

6. This should not be understood as I disagree with Biesta (2017), just that I am following my line of exploration as strict as possible.

The Sophists (500BCE) distinguished themselves from an Aristocratic understanding of education in which the embodiment of culture, *areté*, could only be inherited by blood, and which therefore made education into a gesture for confirmation of what was already considered to be there, inside the aristocratic child, to be brought out and perfected by teaching, and through such perfection perfecting the city-state itself (Jaeger, 1939, pp. 286-287; Säfström, 2018). The sophists claimed three things against the aristocratic principle: 1. *Areté*, how one embodies culture, cannot be a birthright of an elite, it is not exclusive but common; 2. *Areté* is achieved through education and teaching 'from the outside' and is about the world to be taught; and 3. *Areté* is for *anyone*.

In other words, for *paideia* to exist as a particular social sphere, as culture, it needed to be *taught*, and that anyone can be taught anything, can embody *areté* as how one lives one's life. And again, it is this Plato objects to, for him *areté* cannot be taught, it comes with the 'blood'. As such Sophist education opens thinking up to the possibility of democracy, since if anyone could be the bearer of culture by being taught then there were no exclusive ways of motivating the power of an elite to rule all others, than power itself.

Democracy, says Rancière (1999), emerged as the shocking insight that power has no other justification than power itself (p. 16). As such democracy comes into the world as a scandal meaning that anyone can partake in the continuation and change of culture and society, not only an elite reproducing themselves through institutionalised procedures such as schooling. There is no justification for an elite to rule all others based on a given, according to the Sophists, since *areté* was not considered to be a birthright, but taught, in principle to *anyone*.

Such insight makes it possible to understand *change*, since if there is no foundation for reproducing a certain group of people as superior and as continuously realising their eternal destiny over time, then destiny is open to be directed by the will of people here and now. The sophists do not only open for democracy but for the possibility of politics as well, engaged with the world here and now (Jaeger, 1939, 1943).

### 3. ARISTOCRATIC *VERSUS* DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE OF EDUCATION

The second distinction follows from the above, and that is between an *aristocratic principle* in education *versus* a *democratic principle* in education, or between reproduction and change. While an aristocratic principle in education, as was explored above, focuses on the reproduction of an elite, the democratic principle in education focuses on education for anyone, and therefore on the potentiality of change. Such change is open ended, it is 'edifying', it is educational in the sense that it does not

strive to confirm essences, but to live the present in which the potentiality of future is to be invented anew (see also Dewey, 1939).

But there is also another aspect deepening the distinction between the two principles. While the aristocratic principle is about the elusive space of ideas, the democratic principle in education is about the world. The distinction, as such, tends to be a distinction between philosophy, on the one hand, and education, on the other. To explore this further I turn to the allegory of the cave.

In Plato's allegory of the cave (see Bloom's 1991 translation of *The Republic*), the humans are prisoners whose false lives are projected as shadows on the wall, and when one prisoner is led out to the light, he can see the clear air of ideas in which truth shines. A truth only the philosopher can see. The deluded prisoner of the cave is led out by «he, or she, who is not named». The one that leads by hand, the pedagogue, as Tony Carusi (2019) has pointed out, is a non-figure in the allegory, someone who serves a function but which him or herself carries no meaning. He is the unnamed one who releases one prisoner in paragraph 515c, and who is «someone [who] were to tell him that before he saw silly nothings, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what *is* and more turned towards beings he sees more correctly» in paragraph 515d of Plato's Republic (see Bloom, 1991, p. 194). He who is not named leads the prisoner out in the world where the philosopher is blinded by the truth of his importance, deluded to be more than the world in the elusive space of ideas. The split between education as being embodied practice in the world and philosophy as ownership over the space of ideas, is made clear in this foundational allegory for the importance of philosophy, and the subsequent unimportance of the practice of the pedagogue.

That is, the aristocratic principle, as exemplified by Socrates who tells the allegory, works as a way of establishing an exercise through which power is regained through an act of deliberation, in which the clarification of ideas is the goal. Ideas that already are clear for Socrates, the philosopher (who as a character in Plato's writings at least in part, is channelled through Plato's' political project, see Jaeger 1943, pp. 17-27; «The Socratic problem»). As such, Socrates teaching is caught in reproduction of something given rather than to be open for the new to be forming itself in the present order of things. That is, even if one could argue that according to Socrates everyone could reach the realm of clear ideas, Socrates would be the one to judge when that would be the case, from a position of superiority and power of being there already, therefore always pointing out, in comparison, the other as ignorant (Todd, 2003, pp. 28-30). Basically, reproducing a Master – student relationship as one based on reproduction of inequality. To be taught by Socrates is to be reminded of ones ignorance until one is ready to take on the same position as Socrates, it is a process of stultification and sameness. Equality itself becomes reproduction of sameness rather than an expression of a certain relation with the

other, as other, within a plurality of humankind. Plato's Socrates is not, what I can understand, an edifying philosopher in the meaning given by Rorty above, is not in the practice of education, but is a philosopher in the exercise of realising and reproducing the eternal space of ideas, made clear through his method. A method in which the power of the same is reinforced, reproduced by the exclusion of the Other (Todd, 2003, p. 30; also Levinas, 1969, p. 43).

The democratic principle in education, as it was for the Sophists, is about the world, and therefore about living in an ethical-political presence, not reproducing the elusive space of ideas: The Sophists, says Jaeger «came into existence in response to a practical need, not a theoretical and philosophical one.» (p. 295): and, also that they «did not understand philosophy divorced from life.» (p. 296), and therefore saw «ethics and politics taken together [as] one of the essential qualities of true *paideia*.» (Jaeger, 1939, p. 300).

For the Sophists, to educate was to be concerned about the world living in the world as such, and not predominantly about the space of ideas as separate from the world. This difference comes down to different ways in which the sophists on the one hand and the aristocrats on the other understood nature, and how the law of social organisation was represented in nature.

#### 4. ARISTOCRATIC NATURE *VERSUS* DEMOCRATIC NATURE

The third distinction explores the distinction between «aristocratic nature» and «democratic nature», the contrast between the principle of equality which the sophist emphasised as fundamental to nature itself, while the aristocratic perceptions of 'nature' emphasised hierarchy and the rule (and therefore the right) of the strongest. Jaeger says, discussing the discovery of 'culture' and 'nature' as part of a human point of view, that: «they are in fact an aristocratic and a democratic conception of nature.» (Jaeger, 1939, p. 324). While a democratic conception of nature emphasised expressions of equality found in, among other things, geometric forms, the aristocratic conception of nature aimed at showing «that nature is never ruled by mechanical *isonomia* [the political organisation of equality] but by the law of the stronger.» (Jaeger, 1939, p. 324). For aristocrats as Callicles «the [democratic] law of [equality in] nature is directly opposed to the justice of men.» (Jaeger, 1939, p. 325). With the aristocratic view of nature followed the idea that «law [of equality] is an artificial bond, a convention agreed on by the organized weaklings to repress their natural masters, the strong, and make them do their will.» (p. 325). The strong, that is the aristocrats' birthright of embodying *areté*, was to be protected from the democrats and were motivated by nature as the competition of and survival of the strongest.

Therefore, the law of equality for the aristocrats was 'artificial', while a true law of nature was to be reflecting natural inequality and therefore the right of the strongest. The strong was already strong, the aristocratic principle is a principle of reproduction of an elite through schooling and are not concerning education for anyone, other than what is reproduced as sameness. The aristocratic principle is therefore also fixed, can be understood as a 'fixion' in Lacan's sense, as a «fiction one chooses to fix.» (Cassin, 2016, p. 38), while the democratic principle in education is a principle of *praxis*, a principle of engagement with change and the worldliness of the world.

## 5. CULTURE AS STATIC *VERSUS* CULTURE AS *PRAxis*

The fourth distinction which follows from the above is between culture as «static» and culture as «*praxis*» (Bauman, 1999a). The aristocratic principle in education feeds an understanding of culture as «fixed», natural, unchangeable and only to be repeated over time, and is as such today at the heart of the New Right. That is the idea that culture as essentially unchangeable and eternal is at the centre of the New Right and are finding its inspiration in the French nationalist thinker in late 1800s, Maurice Barrés:

Barrés theorised that the culture and the integrity of a nation were 'eternal' and that any change to it, whether brought about by foreign influence or progressive politics, would bring about its demise. Any cultural change, be it to the arts, to the role of women, or racial assumptions, was seen to erode the spirit of the nation and its way of life (Orellana & Michelsen, 2019, p. 5).

We are basically in a situation today, I suggest, in which an aristocratic principle gives meaning to public life, to the extent such public life is an expression of nationalism, through the rise of nationalist parties all over Europe, as well as in other parts of the world<sup>7</sup>. The «fixion» of culture as unchangeable and eternal, for which nationalism is one expression, gives a certain direction to how schooling can operate, in reproducing such fixion, in which the order of the society is already given and only repeated over time. Culture as eternal, seems to make change, emancipation and pluralist democracy itself into a threat to the very existence of a certain nation, and something that needs to be controlled, managed, dealt with also through schooling, making nationalism a basic value for its curriculum: love your nation.<sup>8</sup>

7. BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>

8. Schooling is the process of institutionalising certain hegemonies, or *police* orders, that is, institutions, such as, for example the school, the church, the military, the police, are also certain practices which organise social life in particular ways and in accordance with certain encultured perceptions of

## 6. THE VIOLENCE OF THE ARISTOCRATIC PRINCIPLE

Even if nationalism cannot be reduced to include all variations of school policy all over Europe or the complexities of the conduct of schooling, the very idea of an aristocratic principle of schooling seems to be present in the desires of a nation to identify itself as exclusive, based on a particular police order taking form through a particular history, and to identify this order as based on a certain «authentic self» (which motivates its latent or explicit racism as well). Also, if there is an authentic self, there is also a ‘un-authentic’ self, the latter not really being what one are supposed to be, understood as lacking in essential ways, and in need of special treatment (Rancière, 2007, p. 105). Those self’s do not really matter (Butler, 2015), lacks matter, do not really appear on ‘the stage’, are absent from the dominant web of meaning; being meaningless, and as such do not fill their space and place within the nation, and risks, therefore, be treated as waste (Bauman, 2004).

Schooling then, as an expression of nationalism, is to extract an «authentic self», which is considered to already be there, inside the child, representing the eternal order of national culture, simply in need of being brought out and perfected by teaching, which means to be perfecting the nation as well (Säfström, 2020b). According to Fredrikson (2003), this mix of cultural exceptionalism and nationalism is what gives meaning to the latest stage of racism, a cultural racism, in which «racism exists when one ethnic group or historic collectivity dominates, excludes, or seek to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes are *hereditary an unalterable.*» (p.170; my emphasis). Change is not possible in other ways than as for the individual to incorporate him or herself into the already given cultural order, an order that stays intact as such, at least in principle (Säfström, 2011a).

Since the order of the social is an order we imagine (Castoriadis, 1987), and materialised in institutions, and fixated by the order of the police, the police order (Rancière, 1999, p. 29), it is a particular fixation of the social, backed up by what is considered to be legitim power granted by the particular figuration of the State in question (Rancière, 1999, 2007). But as Culler (1989) has reminded us, the meaning of all actual orders find themselves in a constant state of deconstruction, that is, there is always a slippage, something not possible to be fixed, but deferred and dispersed, and every order is therefore temporary, can never be total, and is therefore in a mode of constant self-deconstruction (Culler, 1989, p. 98).

To hinder such self-deconstruction of the eternity of an (temporary) order, *violence* becomes a necessary condition of such order. To keep up the image of a

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what social life consist of. The point is that what is channelled through those institutionalising bodies is a certain fixation of culture, and increasingly today culture as eternal and as represented by a particular nation, or rather by certain people within that nation, at the expense of others.

certain order as natural, sound and eternal, violence is a necessary social bonding strategy in certain historical political contexts (Žižek, 2008; Feldman, 1991). Violence is essential for social bonding since, as Judith Butler explains «certain social bonds are consolidated through violence, and those tend to be group bonds, including nationalism and racism.» (interview with Judith Butler, 2020b, in *The New Yorker*). Such violent consolidation of social bonds is also a necessary condition of capitalist society. Berardi (2017) says that «violence is no longer a marginal tool for social repression, but a normal mode of production, a special cycle of capital accumulation.» (p. 143). Violence, then, takes the form of a strategy for social bonding within the context of nationalism, racism and capitalism.

Violence, as I understand it in this context, is an aspect of the aristocratic principle, overseeing and repressing the subjectivity of the other, and the value of the other, and manifests him or her as an object of the desires of a nation to be reproducing itself in the light of its own image of cultural authenticity; such violence seeks to purify its' eternal essence of the individual expressed through the nation from which it is granted meaning (which is always a certain interpretation of culture).

Violence in line with, even if not identical with, the aristocratic principle of schooling, then, becomes an act of purification strongly uniting the purified, at the same time as it makes the ones not fitting such purification, into waste, disposable, not worthy to be granted the respect of life, treated as half-life. That is, violence in accordance with the aristocratic principle of schooling, becomes an overriding mechanism for regulating inclusion and exclusion of the social as well as an essential feature of that which is included, of the social bond, of the social as such.<sup>9</sup> And schooling in such context is to be understood as the main process of purification of the authentic self of the nation, a strive for the final perfection: the end of time, of realising the fulfilment of history as such.

## 7. EDUCATING THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE

Education, in contrast, is given meaning through the democratic principle, in which change and emancipation through praxis, is a potentiality of the present, not the past or the future, but as an actuality, education as an *instantiation of change* in social orders (Säfström, 2020b), and is therefore *not reliant* on violence for social bonding (which is not excluding acknowledging the metaphysical violence of existence). The *aim of education is not in purifying essences*, which in their turn are

9. Maybe a prime example of how those mechanisms works in schools is the phenomenon of bullying, which seems to be part of any schooling in any society or nation, at any time in history, see further Säfström (2014).

to be reproduced over time as a multiplication of an single «authentic self» at the heart of a particular nation, brought out and successively purified by an aristocratic principle of schooling. The aim of the democratic principle in education is, rather, *to multiply social relations*,<sup>10</sup> with those whom you may not know, and to establish ways of sustaining those relations; which require, according to Berardi (2017) «to perceive the other as a sensible extension of one's own sensibility.» (p. 55). Which, according to him is also what we cannot do in an aristocratic order of the present since «the ethical catastrophe of our time» (p. 55) is precisely an inability of extension of sensibilities. That is, the tragedy of our time, as I understand it in this context, is an inability to perceive education as the very form in which a sensible extension of sensibilities is made possible.

Education as *praxis* is essentially historic, in the sense that it relies on difference of time, and not on reproduction of the same over time, change is a potentiality of the present here and now that instantiates itself within forces of schooling and brakes away from reproductive processes. As such, education, I want to suggest, takes place if and only if (radical) change is a potentiality of the situation in which education is claimed to take place. Change, as following from the Sophists' introduction of educational theory into intellectual history, is radical, since it is not relying on repetition of a pre-given order of power, justified through fixation of inequality as natural, and equality as cultural, but in acknowledging that the power of the elite has no other justification than power itself, and in the assumption that the law of democracy is *equality*, reflected from the human viewpoint in nature as well.

That democracy has no other justification than power itself is also the reason, says Rancière (2006) for why the elites hate democracy, and why, I say, that they likewise hate education since education takes place through the instantiation of radical change in the present, upsetting the privileges of reproduction. Culture as *praxis* is immanent to educational thought. The aristocratic principle is simply not concerned about education at all, rather being about the reproduction of an elite through schooling and therefore blocks change and emancipation. Education without the instantiation of the potentiality of change is simply not education.

## 8. EDUCATION IN THE SOPHIST TRADITION OF THOUGHT

Education in the Sophist tradition of educational thought today, understands education as embodying the democratic principle and what follows from such a principle: an interest in the worldliness of the world here and now, through change

10. Which is the force of *Eros* (Butler, 2019).

and emancipation. As such, education is distinct from aristocratic understandings of schooling, and what follows from such a principle: an interest in the space of ideas informing reproduction and «fixion» of culture as static. Once this is made clear, it is also clear that education, in the tradition of the Sophists, concerns itself primarily with the worldliness of the world, and not the sphere of ideas of the philosopher as those ideas are ‘applied’ to the world, separated from *praxis* and only ever, if at all, ‘informing’ *praxis*. Rather, education *is praxis*, in which equality is verified, and is as such that which makes democracy democratic.

Once this step is taken, that is, once we accept the absolute difference between schooling as a force of reproduction of power (Hunter 2014) and the school, then we can return to think about ‘the school’ from within educational thought, and as taking form through the democratic principle. Here I want to exemplify such an alternative route through Masschelein and Simons (2015) take on the Greek concept of *Scholé*. The school, then, as well as the university, as Masschelein and Simons (2015) says, are particular forms in which the world is made common, or public: «With the coming into existence of the school form, we actually see the democratisation of free time which at once is [...] the ‘site’ of the symbolic visibility of equality.» (Masschelein & Simons, 2015, p. 86). The school then, from within an understanding of the necessary relation between education and the democratic principle, can be understood as a particular form of equality of ‘free time’, that is where time is not bound by production (Säfström, 2020a), but by study, by putting the worldlines of the world ‘on the table’ (to use Masschelein & Simons’ expression) in order to be examined, and thought anew, and where the verification of equality takes place through the act of teaching (Masschelein & Simons, 2015; Säfström, 2020b).

In other words, a central concept for education is *equality*, since equality cuts right cross the aristocratic principle of reproduction, and manifests the possibility of change and emancipation, of democracy. For Masschelein & Simons (2015), equality is embodied in the very form of the school in which ‘free time’ can operate. I would like to add that teaching, within a tradition of educational thought inspired by the Sophists, now means to verify equality in all instances of the teaching event, to verify that *areté* can be taught to anyone. In the following section I will explore the concepts of equality (Rancière) and grievability (Butler) in order to incorporate them into the ways in which teaching can operate within a revitalised Sophist tradition of educational thought today.

## 9. TEACHING EQUALITY AND THE GRIEVABILITY OF ALL LIVING

The point in teaching is in verifying equality of intelligence (Säfström, 2020b; Rancière, 1991), because it changes fundamentally the way in which we treat and

can treat the other for whom we are responsible as teachers (Todd, 2003; Säfström, 2003). Rancière (1991) says: «Intelligence is not a power of understanding based on comparing knowledge with its object. It is the power to make oneself understood through another's verification.» (p. 72). In assuming equality, in verifying equality a hierarchical relation between teacher and students, manifested through the order of schooling, is interrupted, and the teacher can no longer explain the world for the student as if the student did not live in the world already. Rather, the act of teaching connects different sensibilities of living in the world here and now, allowing new subjectivities to take shape and form, to appear anew in the present order of things; it is to be a teaching equality, rather than reproducing already taken for granted objectified identities.

Teaching, as a verification of equality, is not primarily about how to make sense of the world from a privileged centre, but about a particular way of moving within the world so as to precisely realise one's equal capacity to make meaning, together with others, who, as Bauman (1999b) says, «have the right to go on—differently.» (p. 202). It doesn't mean that the teacher can no longer teach, rather the opposite, that is, teaching as a verification of equality touches a common experience for teachers; it is in the saying teaching take place, not in the said (Säfström, 2003).

With Berardi (2017), to understand teaching as verification of equality is to acknowledge the ethical sensibilities as shared capacities of sensing, to realise the sensing of the present order of things as an extension of one's own capacity. Such partaking of the shared sensing of the order of things, which at the same time are uniquely your own and divided in between us, is the sensible ordering of the worldliness of the world in which we live, what Rancière (2007b) calls 'partage du sensible'. The school is a form of equality which operate, or at least has the potentiality to operate, as a particular 'partage du sensible' of plural democracy.

Equality within teaching, in line with Rancière (1991), does not mean equality in which, each and everyone have to score the same on a test in order for equality to be confirmed. That is, equality is not a price, given by someone to someone else, permitted or granted, or being something to be reached at the end of a long struggle. Equality, for Rancière is not measurable in terms of either quantity, or as distance, but is essentially about each and everyone's ability and capacity to 'live a life' here and now, to speak, and live together with others, to share meaning with those others, and through enacting this capacity equality show itself in practice, as a division of One (May, 2008). Equality signify at least two (Cassin, 2016). By acknowledging what Arendt call 'the plurality of the human condition', equality, as the instantiation of the at least two, divides that which presents itself as One, it divides *Ochlos*: «The two of division is the path followed by a One that is no longer that of collective incorporation but rather that of the equality of One to any other One.» (Rancière, 1995, p. 32) In other words, and with a slightly different emphasis,

*anyone* living is capable of a «equally liveable life» over difference (Butler 2015, p. 69; Säfström 2018), a life understood as valuable to live and therefore grievable if lost (Butler, 2020, p. 58). That is, for Butler, in order for a life to be grievable it has to have value, grievability is signifying the value of life. If there is a difference in socially valuable lives, that will show in how lives are grieved in the social sphere when lost.

Equality, for Rancière is not received from, or granted by the state through a certain social and political organisation but is always *claimed* despite such organisation (Rancière 2007a, pp. 32-33) and as such always breaks into the political and social order of inequality. The 'claiming' though is in the form of verification of equality, the claiming a consequence, an interpretation of an opinion enacted: equality is practiced (Rancière 1991, p. 137). Rancière is not talking about equality/inequality as reduced to particular institutional structures, but as the very way in which certain formations of speaking and being allow certain people to rule others, and the possibility to breaking through of such speech, by speaking is *as if* one matter, even in cases when one is deprived of that right, or maybe particularly in those cases (Rancière, 1999, p. 58, p. 90; Ruitenberg, 2008).

The inequality Rancière talks about is an inequality of 'appearance' of being denied a place on the scene of the social, and as included in and defined by a certain web of meaning as really 'there', as fully present, and as someone that matters, who makes meaning and not just noise. Rancière insists on an active equality (May 2008), as something we do, claim, act and perform based on an assumption that we all are equally capable of making sense. He insists that rationality is the insight that if I can make sense the other can as well (Rancière, 1991, pp. 57-58). That is, to assume equality is rational, to be contrasted with the irrational standpoint that only some are capable of making sense (telling 'truth') while others don't, which rather is an expression of an unfounded power than a meaningful statement.

The insistence on the assumption of equality is making democratic politics possible, but also, it makes education possible, since as the Sophists established, education is the expression of, the activating of, the democratic principle. With Rancière, we can say that such principle is enacted through the verification of equality and therefore the verification of the possibility of education: «[E]ducation is like liberty: it isn't given; it's taken.» (Rancière 1991, p. 107).

Judith Butler (2020), takes equality into another realm, including all life, not only human life, but at least in principle animals and nature as well (Säfström & Östman, 2020). She does so by the insistence on the presumption of grievability of all life (Butler, 2020b, p. 40). Butler argues that what has become increasingly clear during the aids epidemic was not that all life matters to the same degree, but that those affected by aids and the deaths of loved ones, brothers, sisters, children and parents, was not to the same degree grieved as others who died of other causes. To

publicly grieve them was somewhat considered wrong, unethical, as if their lives didn't matter, that they had themselves to blame, and was putting others in danger rather than being victims of the disease (Butler, 2020b). The aids epidemic as well as the sadistic killings of black men by the police (Butler, 2020a) in the USA, is a brutal example of the fact that society is founded on a basic inequality of valued life (Butler, 2015; Säfström 2018).

As I am writing this the pandemic of Covid-19 is raging all over the world, and choices are made daily in intensive care units in hospitals, as well as political calculations of whose life is more valuable than others. If there is a shortage of 'ventilators' who will get them and who will be without, basically left to die? Whose life would be considered 'ethical', 'rational' or 'essential' for the social and political order to save and whose life can be wasted? Privilege is not a full-scale protection against the virus and the privileged of the world cannot totally avoid the threats of falling ill, but certainly its effects hits people quite differently and unequally.<sup>11</sup> We are entering into a situation in which the calculation of 'acceptable' differentiations in the value of life are part of the effects of the pandemic. Or, rather, where the difference in the value of lives already are manifested by the pandemic and made transparent. What is on display all over the world, without any possible dubiety is that certain lives matters and others don't to the same degree, regardless of how rational, scientific, philosophically or politically justifiable the calculations are claimed to be.

It is the difference between incalculable value of life and those whose life are subject to calculation that are on display: «To be subject to calculation is already to have entered the grey zone of the ungrievable.»(Butler, 2020b, p. 107). And also: «Those whose grievability is not assumed are those who suffer inequality-unequal value.» (p. 108).

But what if your life is not considered to really be a life worth living, if your life does not really register as life? If you are, as Rancière (1995) says, included as excluded, at the margins of the social organisation of those who are speaking, as 'half-life' making noise but not really 'taking place'? Butler (2020b), in discussing power, through Foucault and Fanon says: «power is already operating through schemas of racism that persistently distinguish not only between lives that are more and less valuable, more and less grievable, but also between lives that register more or less empathetically as lives.» (p. 112).

That is, in order to break with such foundational inequality the very distinction between grievable and ungrievable lives, that Butler points out, has to be questioned to its core by infusing life with the assumption of equality of all lives, that equality is the first assumption in all encounters with the other, as Rancière says. Again,

11. see *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/5e6330de-1e95-4343-8424-184d19dc34b9>; *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/america-inequality-laid-bare-coronavirus>

while Rancière assumes equal intelligence, Butler extend the assumption of equality through the presumption of grievability to all living. Both understands, however in slightly different ways, such an act in terms of an extension of democracy. That is for both, as for the Sophists, equality is the human viewpoint in nature as well as for political organisation, for democratic culture as such (Jaeger, 1939, p. 324). Butler (2020b) makes the same assumption as the Sophists did, that the ethical and political is the true nature of culture, of *paideia*, and that equality is signalling the way in which democracy operates within such culture: «One reason egalitarian approach to the value of life is important is that it draws from ideals of radical democracy at the same time that it enters into ethical considerations about how best to practice nonviolence.» (p. 61). She continues; «The institutional life of violence will not be brought down by prohibition, but only by a counter-institutional ethos and practice.» (p. 61). Such ethos and practice, I have suggested, is the very *praxis* of education.

The consequence of education, in which ethics and politics comes together as the true expression of *paideia*, and in which the ethical emanates from the equality of grievability, I suggest with Butler (2020b), is that «[t]he presumption of equal grievability would be not only a conviction or attitude with which another person greets you, but a principle that organizes the social organisation of health, food, shelter, employment, sexual life and civil life.» (p. 59). This would profoundly alter the way in which we approach life as we know it and would therefore have profoundly political consequences. It would establish nonviolence as a principle for social bonding, as connected to the ways in which radical democracy operates. It would establish verification of equality as an operational ‘counter-institutional’ strategy of change and emancipation. And finally, it is exactly here we find the tradition of Sophists education today, as the very *praxis of a nonviolent democracy*, among other things in the teaching of, which means the verification of, equality of grievability of all life.

## 10. CONCLUSION

I started this article with a rather playful attitude and ended up in a quite serious matter. I wanted to imagine a Sophist education anew, since education within such tradition is the most important aspect of the possibility of democracy. The invention of educational theory is pre-Plato, and as such not reliant on the split between ‘eternity’ of ideas and the spatial-temporal world. I identified the democratic principle, introduced by the Sophists as that which makes education educational, and as focused on equality in world and nature here and now. Such equality here and now and of the world, I argued are taking form within teaching as the verification of equality in all instances of its existence. Democracy, as the political expression of equality, I understood through Rancière, is not reduceable to certain ways in

which institutions works, and neither is it a way of life. Democracy is rather, the very possibility of a liveable life, to be able to claim one's equality with everyone else's, one's equal 'grievability' as Butler says. That is, democracy is the ability, possibility and right to question the inequality of the order of power on which its institutions are based, and to divide that which present itself as One. The exercise of democracy is to throw back any attempt of closure, to question any fixation of this as that as eternal, back to its contingency, its ambiguity, in order to figure out its meaning anew. Such throwing back demands of us that we sense the sensibilities of others as extensions of our own, that we multiply and extend social relations as well as what makes such extensions possible, and it demands education as an expression of the democratic principle. In practice, Sophist style education today means to object to aristocratic ways of marginalising education through schooling and to embrace the force of living as a shared capacity to make meaning, to claim and to verify equality over difference, for anyone. Education is the ethical political potentiality of a new beginning within the present order of things, and therefore the very *praxis* of change of this order. Education is to imagine new ways of living, of speaking and being, that allow us to hear what was before noise, to see what was before out of sight, to be presented to new subjects literally taking form on the scene on which we all live.

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