

## **Problematization of Meaning: Subjective-Practical Possibilities for Freedom/Liberation in Jan Patočka and Paulo Freire**

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### **Abstract**

This article will address the issue of problematization of meaning and its subjective-practical possibilities for freedom/liberation in Jan Patočka and Paulo Freire. In this regard, I will specifically analyze Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* and Patočka's *Heretic essays in philosophy of history*. Each in their own way, these authors will build important conceptualizations for the possibility of a freer and more humane political society, whether through what I have called a *strong ontology* in Patočka or through a *strong praxis* in Freire. Both authors will seek a constant freedom/liberation that is always questioning the meaning, making unfeasible objectifying practices that hinder the liberating process itself in the constitution of humanity.

**Keywords:** problematization of meaning, freedom, liberation, strong ontology, strong praxis

### **1. Introduction**

In the 20th century, there are many proposals that orbit around critical theories, the problem of freedom/liberation, human subjectivity and the question of autonomy. Along these themes, numerous philosophical currents arise. Among them, phenomenology, developed in Europe and branching out to other continents, and the philosophy of liberation, developed in Latin America, but which finds support in Western discussions. Jan Patočka and Paulo Freire were scholars of phenomenology, however Freire is also the result of the philosophy of liberation. These influences were decisive for the development of the philosophical proposals of these authors.

At first, I will expose the philosophy of these two authors in the book *Heretics essays in the history of philosophy* and in the book *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, through which I will see that each, in their own way, uses a peculiar language and subjects to deal with common themes, contributing significantly to such topics with different connotations. In a second moment, I will make some approximations between the two authors in order to identify common themes and objectives, as well as verify some differences that are essential to understand the focus given by each author to the respective themes leveraged in this article. In a third moment, I will conclude that there is a *strong ontology* in Patočka and a *strong praxis* in Freire that make a valuable contribution to the theme of freedom/liberation under the aegis of the problematization of meaning.

Jan Patočka, Czech philosopher, will bring an ontological basis through which the person, in caring for the soul, recognizes her own limitations and recognizes herself in solidarity with those who suffer some form of violence in relation to freedom. Therewith, a questioning consciousness emerges that is not reduced to its structures, but that transcends consciousness to reach the social being. The problematization of meaning gives constant dynamism to the freedom that is the foundation of political life. This problematizing process brings a responsibility and a risk before the objectifying structures that prevent political life that seeks justice and the good of society.

Paulo Freire, Brazilian philosopher, proposes a liberating action that fights for *the being more* of all. It is an achievement made by all. Consequently, liberation is always an achievement; it is not something that comes from outside, nor achieved by a single individual. This process of liberation will take place through the encounter between teacher/student, revolutionary leadership/people who together, through dialogue they decode reality, problematizing it to build a critical vision in an attempt to transform the oppressive reality through which the oppressed find themselves. This process of liberation will form the identity of a free people that seeks to be more, not allowing an oppressive dehumanization process to transform them into *a being minus*, devoid of autonomy. Thus, Paulo

Freire elaborates the problematizing pedagogy that is a method of liberation of the oppressed people, that is, a reflexive-practical methodological pedagogy for liberation.

Both authors make important considerations around freedom/liberation, being more subjective (Patočka) or more practical (Freire). Even though there are no concrete records that these authors exchanged knowledge in the 20th century, both work on common themes with political reverberations, questioning the meaning taken for granted, opening margins for the possibility of a freer society for all.

## **2. History, freedom and politics in Patočka: unfolding of the problematization of meaning**

Patočka raises a question about the relationship between truth and history: how does the movement of truth take place in its relationship with history? This question will raise a problematization of meaning through which political life will become a search for freedom with all the risks and threats arising from this process. In such a manner, the author asks himself, is an objective, unique, dogmatic truth possible? Is history the representation of truth?

For Patočka, political life does not stand on the firm ground of generative continuity; it confronts itself by its finitude and the permanent precariousness of life. Only by accepting this threat, facing it undaunted, can free life as such develop; the freedom of the undaunted. In contrast to the immediacy of life that struggles for home, for the family, and for the continuum of life, political life is an unsheltered life (Patočka, 1996 pp. 38-39), a free life. The homeless life, a life of reach and initiative without pause or tranquility, is not simply a life of goals, contents, that is, a life of acceptance - it is different, for it itself opens the possibility that it achieves by seeing this liberation, seeing life as it can be (Patočka 1996, 39).

Conforming to Patočka, history arises and can only arise to the extent that there is an *arete*, the excellence of humans who no longer live simply to live, but who make room for their justification by looking at the nature of things and acting in harmony with what they see. Thus, they build a *polis* based on the law of the world that is *polemos*<sup>1</sup>, speaking what they see

as revealing itself to a free, exposed, but undaunted human (Patočka 1996, 43).

Thus, the history of the West, and history as such, has a truly dignified beginning, which shows not only where the great rupture between prehistoric life and history lies, but also at what level historical life must be sustained in order to not succumb to external and internal threats. This beginning extends to a future historical scope, especially teaching what humanity does not want to understand, despite all the immense hardness of history, does not want to understand, something that perhaps only in the last days will they learn after reaching the *nadir* of destruction and devastation. That life needs understand itself not from the point of view of the day, of merely accepted life, but also from the point of view of struggle, of night, and of *polemos*. The purpose of the story is not what can shake itself; but the opening to the shaking (Patočka 1996, 44).

According to Patočka, experiencing the loss of meaning means that the meaning to which we may perhaps return will no longer be for us simply a directly given fact in its integrity. As a result, meaning will never be simply given or conquered. It means that a new relationship emerges, a new way of relating to what is significant; this meaning can only emerge in an activity that stems from a search for meaninglessness, as the vanishing point of the problematic being, as an indirect epiphany (Patočka 1996, 60-61).

In such a wise, the author defends, that history differs from prehistoric humanity by the shaken of the accepted meaning. In accepting responsibility for themselves and others, humans implicitly pose the question of meaning in a new and different way. They are no longer content with enslaving life to itself, with subsistence as the content of life and service in the sweat of their brow as the fate of beings destined for episodocity and subordination. Thus, the result of the primordial shake-up of accepted meaning is not a fall into meaninglessness, but, on the contrary, the discovery of the possibility of reaching a more free and demanding meaning. This connects itself with this explicit fear before being as a whole, the total realization that the totality of being exists, which, according to the ancient

philosophers, is really the innermost *pathos* and origin of philosophy (Patočka 1996, 62-63).

In such a way, in the historical epoch, humanity does not avoid what is problematic, but actually invokes it, promising itself an access to a deeper meaning than that of prehistoric humanity. In the community, the *polis*, in the life dedicated to the *polis*, in the political life, humans make room for an autonomous, purely human sense of mutual respect in meaningful activity for all its participants. That is not restricted to the preservation of physical life, rather is the source of a life that transcends itself in the memory of the action guaranteed precisely by the *polis*. In many ways it is a more risky and dangerous life than the vegetative humility on which prehistoric humanity depends. Likewise, the explicit questioning that is philosophy is much riskier than the submerged conjecture that is myth. It is riskier because it draws all life, both individual and social, into the region of the transformation of meaning, a region where it must completely transform in its structure because it transforms itself in its meaning. This is precisely what the story means (Patočka 1996, 63-64).

In line with Patočka, humans cannot live without meaning, and without a global and absolute meaning in that. This means: humans cannot live in the certainty of meaninglessness. However, does not that mean they cannot live with a sought after and problematic meaning (Patočka 1996, 75)?

In fact, we are dealing only with the revelation of a meaning, which explains not itself as a thing, but which is present only in the pursuit of being. For this reason, too, we cannot find it directly in things, directly together with them as a relative and positive meaning. The basis of this meaning, in Weischedel's terms, is the problematic; in Heidegger's terms, the concealment of what is as a whole as the basis of all openness and all revelation. Therefore, this mystery expresses itself in the shaking of a naively accepted meaning. Thus, the shake-up of naive meaning is the genesis of a perspective on an absolute meaning to which, however, humans are not marginal, provided humans are prepared to give up hope of a directly given meaning and accept meaning as a way forward (Patočka 1996, 77).

For Patočka, truth is a condition of historical life, not as absolute truth, but as a search for meaning, to problematize what prevents this search itself, that is, problematize what does not allow us to be free to give meaning. An absolute truth already takes away the essential character of political life - which is freedom. The restriction of freedom in the *polis* is a condition of the restriction of the truth itself, which is revelation and concealment, which is day and darkness. Nevertheless, what makes human beings just and true?

### 3. The care of the soul

For the author, what makes humans just and true is care for the soul. Caring for the soul is the legacy of ancient Greek philosophy. Taking care of the soul means that truth is not something that is given once and for all, nor is it merely a matter of observing and recognizing the observed, but a lifelong inquiry, a self-controlling and unifying intellectual and vital practice. Greek thought distilled care for the soul into two forms: we care for the soul so that it could undertake its spiritual journey through the world, the eternity of the cosmos, in complete purity and undistorted vision, and so for at least a brief time to achieve the way of existing typical of the gods. On the other hand, we think and learn to turn our soul into that firm crystal of being, a crystal of immaculate steel in the vision of eternity, which represents one of the possibilities of the being that carries within itself the source of movement, of deciding its being or not being (Patočka 1996, 82). Care for the soul is the practical form of that discovery of the Whole and of the explicit spiritual relationship with it that already takes place in Ionic proto-philosophy. In order for that to happen, it is necessary to recognize our own limitations of mortality and finitude and, with that, our condition of solidarity.

In a similar vein, Patočka uses the analogy of the experience of the front line of war, an expression used so powerfully by Teilhard de Chardin and Jung. Patočka speaks of the experience of the front as the liberating experience itself. The Force that subdues the individual, putting her in the front line, will make her fragile, mortal. Therefore, it appears characteristic of the solidarity of the shaken, which is originally

born among combatants who are aware of their own mortality and finitude. As a result, they question all goals in life. Therefore, the *Force* itself feels questioned in its dictating power. We can say that the means by which this state overcomes itself is the solidarity of the shaken, the solidarity of those who are capable of understanding what life and death are, and what history is. This story is the conflict of mere life, barren and chained by fear. Only the person who is capable of understanding this, who is capable of conversion, who is capable of *metanoia*; - is a spiritual person (Patočka 1996, 134-135).

In line with Patočka, the solidarity of the shaken is the solidarity of those who understand. However, understanding in the present circumstances must involve not only the basic level, that of bondage and freedom with respect to life, but it must also involve an understanding of the meaning of science and technology, of that *Force* that we are releasing. All the forces on which humans can live in our time are potentially in the hands of those who understand. The solidarity of the shaken can say no to the mobilization measures that make the state of war permanent. It will not offer positive programs, but will speak, like Socrates' *daimonion*, in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could bring the warrior world to some restriction, making some acts and measures impossible (Patočka 1996, 135).

As specified by Patočka, technical intellectuals must understand their position in this struggle against the *Force*, as they understand the current scientific and technical possibilities and have the vision that the *Force* has destructive possibilities. Patočka says that only when researchers and applicators, discoverers and engineers feel the influence of the solidarity of the shaken in their own skin, and when they begin to act in accordance with that solidarity, only then will it be possible to overcome the *Force*.

Humanity will not achieve peace by devoting itself and surrendering to the criteria of everyday life and its promises. All who betray this solidarity must realize that they are sustaining the war and are the fringe parasites who live on the blood of others (Patočka 1996, 134-135).

The important thing now is that the human being cannot reduce herself to consciousness and its structures. We need to transcend consciousness to reach the social being. Once we have reached that being capable of freeing herself from dependence on life and linking that life to something free, something capable of accepting responsibilities and respecting responsibilities, that is, the freedom of others. Then it will not be necessary to explain precisely the history, particularly, the most basic human realization, of this dimension of the human being, and not of consciousness (Patočka 1996, 153)?

The requirement that being defines our consciousness meet itself not when human life considers itself only as integrated into objective sequences. Within this framework, the question of the true nature of the human being is left aside, along with the whole fundamental problem of philosophy. Here is the problem of being as such, passing through a dimension of life as if life were on the one hand a basis objective on which it depends and, on the other hand, a subject who observes it and fixes it through her observation (Patočka 1996, 153-154).

Precisely in history, this domain of change in man's social being, the terrain of traditions in which we establish continuity with our positive and negative conquests, by rejecting or continuing, man's social being can manifest itself as essentially free. Therefore, accessible to us objectively insofar as we can retrospectively observe what of this transmutes itself into firmly established facts, but we cannot reduce them to these facts alone and perhaps attempt to explain them unreservedly in terms of some region of fact (Patočka 1996, 154).

Political life, which constitutes the *polis* under the aegis of freedom, through which the determined and objectified meaning shakes itself, problematizing it, assumes the responsibility resulting from a *homeless life*, that is, without security guarantee, but which bases itself on the discovery of new possibilities.

This is how the story begins, because of the risk of being open to the shake of meaning. Such a western heritage places meaning in a new and different way that characterizes itself as the discovery of the possibility of reaching a more free and demanding meaning. Now, the truth is a search for meaning



and it conjectures itself as a constant process of problematizing what prevents the search itself, specially, what suppresses the freedom to confer meaning.

Truth and justice are part of a search process that takes place through care for the soul, through which we recognize our own limitations of mortality and finitude, leading us to the path of solidarity. However, when we see ourselves in the same situation of domination as the other, whatever it may be, we feel in solidarity, shaken by the same dictating power (solidarity of the shaken). From this experience, a questioning consciousness emerges that is not reduced to its structures, but that transcends consciousness to reach the social being. It is a liberating experience, since, aware of domination and the structures of domination, one can say no, establishing restrictions that make some acts and measures impossible. For Patočka, history itself presents us with errors and possibilities for freedom, as well as the search for a social being, however without such sources that reduces itself to static truths that contradict the process of constant search for justice and the truth of social being.

#### **4. Paulo Freire and the authentic struggle for *being more***

At the beginning of his work *Pedagogy of the oppressed* Paulo Freire states that humanization and dehumanization, within history and in a concrete and real way, are possibilities for people as uncompleted beings and conscious of their incompleteness. Dehumanization observes itself both in those who have their humanity stolen, and in those who steal it, as they distort the understanding of *being more* and *being less* (Freire 2018, 40).

For Freire, a strong factor that suppresses the search for *being more* is because in the behavior of the oppressed there may be a prescribed behavior, that is, one that has a hostile consciousness of the oppressive consciousness. This hostile consciousness fears freedom, because freedom requires filling the void with autonomy, and that brings responsibility. The author thus emphasizes that freedom is an achievement and not a donation; it requires a constant search. Hence the need to overcome the oppressive situation. This implies critical recognition together with a

transforming action, instituting another situation that allows that search for *being more* (Freire 2018, 40).

In conformity with the author, when the authentic struggle takes place to create the situation that will be born from the overcoming of the old, one is already struggling to *be more* (Freire 2018, 47). However, the oppressed will not become oppressors themselves if they generate from their *being less* the search for *being more* of all. In such manner, the authentic struggle is represented by the true solidarity that makes us be a being for another (Freire 2018, 50) in an objective and not just abstract way (Freire 2018, 51).

Within this context of authentic struggle, *praxis* becomes the reflection and action of people on the world to transform it. In that respect, in the wake of Lukács, Freire says that the more the popular masses reveal the objective and challenging reality on which they must focus their transforming action, the more they critically insert themselves into it. However, differing from Lukács, the issue is not exactly to explain to the masses, but to dialogue with them about their action (Freire 2018, 54). Even so, the duty that Lukács recognizes to the revolutionary party to explain its action to the masses coincides with the demand for the critical insertion of the masses into their reality through *praxis* (Freire 2018, 55).

Freire inserts his conception of pedagogy of the oppressed, in the clear intention of elaborating a method for pedagogical liberation; it is a humanist and liberating pedagogy, having two distinct moments. The first, in which the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and commit, in *praxis*, to its transformation. The second, in which, transforms the oppressive reality. This pedagogy is no longer of the oppressed and becomes the pedagogy of people in the process of permanent liberation. In any of these moments, it will always be the profound action, through which the culture of domination culturally confronts itself. At first, through a change in the perception of the oppressive world on the part of the oppressed; in the second, by the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the oppressive structure and that are preserved as mythical specters, in the new structure that emerges from the revolutionary transformation (Freire 2018, 57).

Paulo Freire recalls that the oppressed of yesterday, who detain the former oppressors in their eagerness to oppress, will be generating, with their act, freedom, insofar as, with it, they avoid the return of the oppressive regime. An act, which forbids the restoration of this regime, cannot compare itself with what creates and maintains it; it cannot compare itself with that through which some people deny the majority the right to be (Freire 2018, 60).

According to the author, the oppressors of yesterday will never recognize themselves in liberation. They will feel oppressed, because before they could eat, dress, wear, educate themselves, go for a walk, listen to Beethoven, while millions were not eating, not wearing, not studying, not even walking, much less listening to Beethoven. Any restriction on all this, in the name of everyone's right, seems to them to be a profound violation of their personal right (Freire 2018, 60-62). Accordingly, the oppressor sees the humanization of the oppressed as subversion and, consequently, freedom. Therefore, the need to maintain constant control over the oppressed, transforming them into things, into something that is as if it were inanimate. This tendency of the oppressors to inanimate everything and everyone, which is found in their craving for possession, is identified with the sadistic tendency (Freire 2018, 64).

Following Freire, if the oppressed cannot locate the oppressor concretely, as well as until she becomes a conscience for herself, she assumes fatalistic attitudes in the face of the situation of oppression she is in. In the author's understanding, this fatalism usually refers itself to the power of fate; for example, God willed it that way (Freire 2018, 67). Another factor is to feel an irresistible attraction to the oppressor, in the sense of wanting to look like the oppressor, imitating her, following her. There is also the issue of self-depreciation that results from the introjection that the oppressed makes of the oppressors' view of them. From hearing so much that they are incapable, they end up being convinced of their incapacity (Freire 2018, 69).

In accordance with the author, no one frees anyone; no one frees herself alone: people free themselves in communion (Freire 2018, 71). The oppressed, in the various moments of

their liberation, need to recognize themselves as people, in their ontological and historical vocation to be more (Freire 2018, 72). In light of this, political action with the oppressed has to be cultural action for freedom, and for that very reason, action with them (Freire 2018, 73).

In Freire's view, the education to be practiced by the revolutionary leadership is done in co-intentionality, that is, educator and students, co-intentioned to reality, find themselves within a task in which both are subjects in the act, not only of unveiling it and, thus, critically knowing it, but also in recreating this knowledge (Freire 2018, 77-78). In that case, through which paths and through which assumptions one could transform a submissive reality into a liberating reality. How to create a liberating pedagogy?

### **5. From banking education to problematizing education**

According to Freire, educator-student relationships in schools have a special and remarkable character, which is that they are fundamentally narrating, lecturing relationships (Freire 2018, 79). The narration leads the students to mechanical memorization of the narrated content in such a way that the students are the depositaries and the educator, the depositor. That would be the form of banking education (Freire 2018, 80). The banking view of education encourages the absolutization of ignorance that always occurs in the other (Freire 2018, 81).

The oppressors are interested in people becoming passive and adapted to the world. For the author, the oppressors will be so much more at peace; the more suited people are to the world. On the contrary, the more concerned, the more people question the world. (Freire 2018, 88)

In line with Freire, the educator's thinking only gains authenticity in the authenticity of the students' thinking, both mediated by reality and in intercommunication. Therefore, there is no imposition in thinking or isolated thinking, however, in and through communication around reality. Influenced by Fromm, Freire asserts that oppression, which is overwhelming control, is *necrophilia* and not *biophilia* (Freire 2018, 89-90). In this particular field, when a mechanical, static, specialized

knowledge of consciousness found itself and in which, for this very reason, it transforms the students into recipients, into almost things, it cannot hide its *necrophilia* mark. It does not allow itself to move itself by the spirit of freeing thought through the action of men with one another in the common task of remaking the world and making it more and more human (Freire 2018, 91).

Unlike banking education, Freire presents problematizing education. The latter identifies itself with the very nature of consciousness, which is always consciousness of, not only when it intends on objects, but also when it turns back on itself, becoming consciousness of consciousness (Freire 2018, 94). In such manner, the problematizing educator constantly *re-does* her cognizing act, in the students' cognoscitivity. Thus, the role of the educator is to provide, with the students, the conditions in which knowledge overcomes itself at the level of *doxa* by true knowledge, which occurs at the level of *logos* (Freire 2018, 97). While banking education aims to maintain immersion; the second, on the contrary, seeks the emergence of consciences, resulting in their critical insertion in reality (Freire 2018, 98).

In Freire's view, people are historical beings and, as such, they are beings, as unfinished beings, unfinished in and with a reality, which, being historical too, is equally unfinished (Freire 2018, 101-102). In such wise, while the banking concept emphasizes permanence, the problematizing concept reinforces change. Problematizing education, which is not reactionary fixism, is revolutionary futurity. Hence, it is prophetic and, as such, hopeful (Freire 2018, 102).

For Freire, human existence cannot be mute, silent, nor can nourishes itself by false words, but by true words, with which men transform the world. To exist is to pronounce the world, to change it constantly (Freire 2018, 108). Thus, dialogue is an existential requirement (Freire 2018, 109) whereby where people meet to pronounce the world, it must not be a donation of the pronouncement of one to another. It is an act of creation.

In the author's view, there is no dialogue if there is not a deep love for the world and for people. Thus, it is not possible to pronounce the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, if there is no love to infuse it (Freire 2018, 110). Therefore,

sinking into love, as well as humility and faith in people, makes dialogue take place in trust and hope (Freire 2018, 113). In the dialogue, the programmatic content of education will emerge. It will take place in the present, existential, concrete context, reflecting the set of aspirations of the people (Freire 2018, 119). This context problematizes itself, bringing challenges, demanding answers (Freire 2018, 120). For Freire, it is in the mediating reality that we will seek the programmatic content of education. Thus, the moment of this search is what inaugurates the dialogue of education as a practice of freedom. It is the moment in which the investigation of what we call the thematic universe of the people or the set of its generating themes that carries itself out (Freire 2018, 121).

For Freire, the investigation of the generating theme carries itself out through an awareness-raising methodology, in addition to enabling its apprehension; it inserts people into a critical way of thinking about the world (Freire 2018, 134). There is a process of decoding the existential situation, which implies starting abstractly towards the concrete. This implies a journey from the parts to the whole and a return from this to the parts, which implies a recognition of the subject in the object and of the object as a situation in which the subject is. This process gains significance as it undergoes the split and in which thinking returns to it, based on the dimensions resulting from the split (Freire 2018, 135).

In Freire's view, the investigation of the people's thinking cannot happen without the people, but with them, as the subject of their thinking (Freire 2018, 141). Thus, the more one investigates the thinking of the people with them, the more we educate ourselves together. The more we educate ourselves, the more we continue to investigate (Freire 2018, 142).

## **6. The 'what-to-do': union between action and reflection**

For Freire, we are beings of *what-to-do*, because our doing is action and reflection, it is transformation of the world. Thus, every doing of *what-to-do* must have a theory that necessarily enlightens it. *What-to-do* is theory and practice (Freire 2018, 167-168). As it is a theory of revolutionary action,

it is not possible to speak either of an actor, in the singular, or only of actors, in the plural, but of actors in intersubjectivity, in intercommunication. On this wise, to avoid dialogue is to fear freedom. It is fearing one's own people or not believing in them (Freire 2018, 173). That is why the revolutionary leadership cannot think without the people, not for them, but with them (Freire 2018, 176).

The theory of anti-dialogical action has characteristics of which it seeks to keep the people oppressed. Among them is the conquest that seeks to mythologize the world so that everything that is an object of oppression sees itself now as something positive, as if the oppressive order were an order of freedom. Thus, the conquerors are the heroes and the oppressed lazy, dependent, ignorant, etc (Freire 2018, 188). Another characteristic is to divide to maintain the oppression to the point that the oppressors find a series of tricks to divide the organization and communion of the people (Freire 2018, 190), because these unified and organized, make their weakness a transforming force, with which they can recreate the world, making it more human (Freire 2018, 195). A third characteristic is manipulation, which, like the conquest it serves, has to anesthetize the popular masses so that they do not think (Freire 2018, 200). Finally, we have the cultural invasion, which is the penetration made by the invaders into the cultural context of the invaded, imposing their worldview on them, while curbing creativity, being a violence to the being of the invaded culture, which loses its originality or finds itself threatened to lose it (Freire 2018, 205).

While in the theory of anti-dialogical action conquest, as its first characteristic, implies a subject who, conquering the other, transforms him into an almost thing, in the dialogical theory of action, for Freire, subjects meet for the transformation of the world into co-existence. In this degree, the anti-dialogical, dominating *I* transforms the dominated, conquered *you* into a mere *this*. The dialogic *self*, on the contrary, knows that it is exactly the *you* that constitutes it. She also knows that, constituted by a *you*, a not *me*, this *you* that constitutes her constitutes herself, in turn, like *me*, having in her *I* a *you*

(Freire 2018, 126-127). In this way, the *I* and the *you* become, in the dialectic of these constitutive relationships, two *you* that become two *I*. In agreement with Freire, contrary to the theory of anti-dialogical action that seeks to mythologize the world, dialogical action seeks to unveil the world (Freire 2018, 229).

According to Freire, in the theory of dialogical action, unlike the anti-dialogical one, leadership commits itself to the tireless effort of uniting the oppressed with each other, and with them, for liberation (Freire 2018, 234). Thus, the concrete situation of oppression, by dualizing the *self* of the oppressed, by making her ambiguous, emotionally unstable, fearful of freedom, facilitates the dividing action of the dominator in the same proportions in which it hinders the unifying action indispensable to the liberating practice (Freire 2018, 235-236).

Dialogical action aims to provide the oppressed, recognizing the why and how of their adherence, to exercise an act of adherence to the true *praxis* of transforming an unjust reality (Freire 2018, 237).

In consonance with Freire, while, in the theory of anti-dialogical action, manipulation, which serves conquest, imposes itself as an indispensable condition for the dominating act, in the dialogical theory of action, we will find, as its antagonistic opposite, the organization of the popular masses, which is a natural unfolding of the unity of the popular masses (Freire 2018, 240). Unlike anti-dialogical action, dialogic action, in its organization, does not objectify, but its organization leads to the practice of freedom. To this extent, in the theory of dialogic action, organization, implying authority, cannot be authoritarian; implying liberty cannot be licentious. On the contrary, it is a highly pedagogical moment, in which the leadership and the people learn together the true authority and freedom that both, as a single body, seek to establish, with the transformation of the reality that mediates them (Freire 2018, 245).

Unlike cultural invasion, dialogic action makes cultural synthesis. Thus, as there are no invaders in the dialogic action, there are no imposed models. (Freire 2018, p. 249). However, Freire reminds us, because it is a synthesis, it does not imply



that the goals of revolutionary action tie itself up to the aspirations contained in the people's worldview. In the words of Freire: "Neither invasion of leadership into the popular view of the world, nor adaptation of leadership to the aspirations, often naive, of the people (Freire 2018, 250)". The solution lies in synthesis. On the one hand, to join the people in the claiming aspiration. On the other hand, to problematize the meaning of the claim itself (Freire 2018, 251).

The people, in turn, while oppressed, introjecting the oppressor, cannot alone constitute the theory of their liberating action. It is only in her encounter with the revolutionary leadership, in the communion of both, in the *praxis* of both - that this theory makes itself and remakes itself (Freire 2018, 252).

Freire proposes a liberating action that fights for being more of all. It is an achievement made through a constant process of liberation from the state of oppression. This liberation, which is an achievement, accomplishes itself through political action with the oppressed, to wit, through revolutionary leadership with the oppressed.

## **7. Approximations and differences between Freire and Patočka**

For both authors, problematization refers to problematizing a meaning seen as objectified and finished. For Patočka, the solidarity that emerges from the shaken gives itself by the problematization of our existence, to wit, by the weakening of certainties that continually question itself. This constancy in problematizing leads to a proposal of freedom exercised in the political sphere. The political life that takes place in this open sphere is one of freedom and for freedom. It is freedom, because it comes from open debate. It is for freedom, because it wants itself, that is, the continuity of the movement of existence (the shaken) through which this public, political space appears in genuinely free debates (Mensch 2016, 124).

Problematization, in accord with Patočka, is part of the third movement of existence. The exemplary figure is Socrates, whose movement was constantly to question his time assumptions. The questioning that it problematizes is

something founded on the deepest basis of our life, by which we affirm ourselves, and not on the certainties we previously assumed. This terrain is our own freedom. The problematization requires that we take responsibility for it, that we recognize that the certainties we assume are not fixed, but are, in part, the result of our choices. According to Patočka, the spiritual life based on such problematization is precisely also action based on the perception that reality is not rigid. Taking care of the soul in this context is taking care of our freedom as we engage in it. This is because to problematize something is to place it in the context of its alternatives. It is asking why we shape our world the way we do, and not the other way around (Mensch 2016, 125-126).

Life in the *polis* must always understand itself in relation to its strong understanding of history that characterizes itself, like the *polis* itself, by freedom from problematicity. (Adams, 2016, p. 224). Thus, for the author, what the spiritual person does by throwing her non-self-evident nature in the face of society is to show the groundless nature of society and existence, and this cannot be anything other than a political act. (Caraus 2016, 243). Therefore, constitutive pluralism comes from the contingency of meaning: the absolute/final meaning is problematic and this makes room for a plurality of meanings. (Caraus 2016, 246).

For Freire, the problematization of meaning has to do with an involvement with reality. There is not a reality in the classroom and another reality in the world outside the school walls. Therefore, problematizing education has the same structure that occurs between teacher/student and revolutionary leadership/people, to wit, the same liberating pedagogical method, which is one for society. Problematization promotes dialogue and a sense of critical analysis that allows students to develop a willingness to dialogue not only in the classroom but also outside of it. Paulo Freire's pedagogical proposal is not only to bring reality into the classroom, but also to bring the classroom to reality, in other words, pedagogy, in addition to liberating, must bring about its own leadership – the revolutionary leadership. Thus, the teacher is a revolutionary leader who forms revolutionary leaders who, in

turn, form a people who seek a transformation towards liberation. Of course, the ultimate goal is not to create leadership, but to liberate the people that we all are. Liberation, in turn, brings autonomy so that we can all be the author and protagonist of the constant search for liberation.

As liberation belongs to the people, this implies renouncing the oppressive elements juxtaposed in society and, at the same time, announcing the commitment to the liberation of the oppressed through dialogue, the problematization of social reality and political transformation (Roberts 2000, 59). Indeed, one of its most important messages is that we need to break with individualistic thinking and begin to problematize reality in holistic and structural terms. Freire defends collective action against oppressive social formations, of which banking education is an example (Roberts 2000, 66).

This process of liberation, the author assumes, drives itself by participation in critical dialogue and continuous emancipatory actions, in the name of social transformation (Darter 2015, 83). As such, the phenomenon of conscientization is also deeply informed by our ability to enter into the problematization of hegemony (Darter 2015, 88). Thus, any pedagogy in the interest of liberation must fundamentally focus itself on the problematization of our domestication and the transformation of the myths that preserve the oppressed-oppressor contradiction. (Darter 2015, 113). Here lies the strength of a problematizing pedagogy that problematizes everything that contradicts our freedom to be and fights for the restoration of our humanity (Darter 2015, 124).

The problematization, both for Freire and for Patočka, has political implications, as the problematization undermines the meaning taken for granted, pointing out new possibilities of meaning. For both authors, this problematization must lead to freedom/liberation that sustains itself by its questioning constancy. However, Patočka refers more to the individual who problematizes; even if this problematization awakens itself through the solidarity of the shaken and that it, itself has political implications within the *polis*, which, in turn, must watch over the very constancy of freedom, thus guaranteeing the problematic. Freire always refers to a problematizing

dialogic collective process that takes place between teacher/student, revolutionary leadership/people. Consequently, while in Freire liberation is only possible in a collectivity, in Patočka it is only possible for those who face the risk of responsibility arising from freedom.

As Patočka's concern directs itself more to those who assume responsibility for freedom, it will need to address ontological aspects. For that, the author will seek subsidies in the Greek concept of *taking care of the soul*. Care for the soul is a foundation for politics and ethics devoid of metaphysical character. Therefore, the understanding of soul care does not lead to transcendental harmony; caring for the soul is rather a difficult process that involves conflict and requires a willingness to sacrifice (Findlay 2002, 10). In such a manner, the willingness of the person to accept a problematic life and to speak with sincerity in the public sphere becomes important.

Philosophy defines itself, through the reading of Plato from Patočka, not as the guardian of the soul in its journey to a final truth, but as the action of directing its continuous movement through a process driven by the questioning of reality (Findlay 2002, 65). Truly, the concept of the soul and our care for it can serve as a basis for human behavior. It gives lasting and unified form to that part of our being, which directs our movement and activity. Through thinking that is at the heart of Patočka's view of philosophy, we engage in a process of "inner formation of the soul itself, formation into something uniformly solid and, in that sense, existent – precisely because it is engaged in thinking (Findlay 2002, 67).

Already in Freire, there is a natural condition in the human being to seek to be more. When the oppressed are prevented from being more, they dehumanize themselves. However, not only the oppressed, the oppressor dehumanizes herself by oppressing. This is because humanization is only possible through a collective process of liberation. In such terms, being more is only possible in the collectivity. We could say that, in Patočka, the individual establishes her identity from within herself, that is, she recognizes her existential condition and that of others, as well as seeks to question what is taken for granted. For Freire, the individual establishes her identity

based on the collectivity, in dialogues that problematize and decode reality, transforming it.

## 8. Final considerations

Both Patočka and Freire make important contributions to problematization. Such contributions foster practical implications in relation to subjectivity and human action in political life. These implications direct the search for freedom/liberation. In Freire, subjectivity is collectively constructed in relation to liberation, which leaves a gap in the understanding of the individual's autonomy. How can she be autonomous, be more, if her subjectivity is linked to the collectivity? Freire lacks a substantial ontology that gives autonomy to the person to disagree with her own revolutionary assumptions. We could say that Paulo Freire has a *weak ontology*, disconnected from the autonomous capacity of the individual. Thus, the person only makes sense in the collectivity, is not able to problematize alone, or find a way to liberation alone. Patočka, on the other hand, has a *strong ontology*, which allows the person to recognize herself as a free being, problematizing herself and who recognizes herself in solidarity with the other. We do not find, in Freire, the possibility of the human person perceiving herself as oppressed, of carrying out an analysis of society in its oppressive structure. There is a depersonalization in Freire, that is, the subject loses her autonomy in building her own personality, losing herself in a collective identity.

With regard to freedom, Patočka is unable to establish a practical proposal for its realization; it is only possible to draw implicatory practical questions, coming from a being who recognizes herself in existential solidarity with the other. We could say that Patočka has a *weak praxis*, through which she cannot give objectivity to her own freedom in a concrete way. Freire, on the other hand, establishes a clear proposal for the liberation of the people, including a pedagogical method of liberation, through which, teacher/student, and revolutionary leadership/people, together, can decode, criticize, problematize

and transform the reality that presents itself as oppressive. Perhaps the very connotation of the word liberation brings in itself a concreteness and a practical search, while the word freedom refers to a more abstract bias, an ideal achieved.

Although there are no reliable records that both authors exchanged knowledge in the 20th century, both work on common themes, albeit with different connotations. Thus, both authors contribute immensely to the theme of the human being in her quest for freedom/liberation. How can the human being be free, autonomous? How to build, concretely, the liberation of a people? How can freedom/liberation maintain itself as a constant practice? How can political activity help to build a free people? These questions can find possible answers in the assumptions leveraged by Paulo Freire and Jan Patočka.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology, *Polemos* was a daemon; a divine personification or personification of war. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus described *Polemos* as the king and father of all, with the ability to bring everything into existence and to annihilate.

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