

**EQUALITY - NOW OR NEVER:
THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ENVER HOXHA**

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Abstract

Students of politics know very well that Plato's perfect city in Republic is a political model of philosophico-pedagogical tyranny. For Ranciere, the political thought of the thinker of autocratic hierarchy, namely Plato, has much to do with what Ranciere calls the founding gesture of philosophy. In other words, since Plato, a silent majority has always been excluded from the privilege of thought and art and this has helped the construction of the implicit alliance between philosophy and the repressive order of social hierarchy. According to Ranciere, Marx, Sartre, Althusser and Bourdieu, despite their intellectual standing in the Left, are thinkers of inequality and pedagogical privilege. Each assumes, as Plato does, that the pedagogue must think for and educate those who are unable to think for themselves; only then will society change for the better. Yet, the fundamental gesture of philosophy (and even science) not only provides privileges to intellectuals but also continuously postpones the actual realization of achieving equality. If we take equality as an end rather than a presupposition or an axiomatic point of departure it would only prolong the hierarchy between "those who know" and "those who does not know". In this paper, I plan to examine Enver Hoxha's political thought from a Rancierean perspective. I mainly focus on a major concept which unifies Ranciereian thought, that being "equality".

Keywords: *Enver Hoxha, Jacques Ranciere, equality.*

In this paper I examine Enver Hoxha's political thought from a Rancierean perspective. Actually I am going to focus on one major concept, *equality*, and the way Ranciere formulates this concept.

Jacques Ranciere is a French philosopher who was born in Algeria in 1940. In 1965, at the age of twenty-five, Jacques Ranciere, as a true believer of Althusserianism, contributed to Althusser's influential work, *Reading Capital*. While it would be misleading to suggest that he was totally forgotten after his contribution to Louis Althusser's *Reading Capital*, it has taken several decades for the work of Jacques Ranciere to find a wide audience.

Ranciere began to separate himself ideologically from Althusser after having contributed to *Reading Capital* because of Althusser's perspective regarding the student uprising in Paris which occurred in May of 1968. Furthermore, he even became quite critical of Althusser himself. "The May' 68 revolt crystallized his objections to Althusser's thought and much of Ranciere's work thereafter can broadly be understood as the attempt to give discursive form to the idea of radical equality implicit in May but unrecognized, at the time, by Althusser." (Davis, 2010, p.1).

The central unifying concept in Ranciere's work is equality. Let me quote from Jean-Philippe Deranty, who wrote several essays and a book on Ranciere's thought:

The many books Ranciere has written, covering a wide array of topics, make up one coherent conceptual world. This coherence stems from a fundamental ... [idea]: the idea that equality is not an essence, a value or a goal, but the first presupposition from which theory must start. This simple and radical axiom led to the break with Althusserianism in the 70s. Underneath Althusser's shifting intellectual position, and in Marxism more generally, Rancière recognised the same fundamental gesture that, according to him, was also the founding gesture of philosophy: the exclusion of a silent majority from the privilege of thought and art, the implicit alliance between philosophy and the repressive order of social hierarchy. Against this elitist posture, Rancière holds that the role of the philosopher is not to give his/her voice to the silent aspirations of the dominated, but to add his/her voice to theirs, to hear their voices, rather than interpret them, to help them resound, to make them circulate. The division of labour that keeps apart the intellectual's science from ordinary experience is an ideological fallacy that perpetuates the relations of domination (Deranty, 2003, p.1).

Ranciere based his radical conception of equality on "critical reflection on, and polemical reaction against, the philosophical pedagogies of" (Deranty, 2003) Althusser, Marx, Sartre and Bourdieu in both his well known book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and other works. It is Ranciere's belief that these savants take it for granted both the pedagogical power and the social privilege of intellect which was first postulated in Plato's *Republic*.

According to Ranciere, Althusser tried to secure a role for Marxist intellectuals in the revolution through his attempt to create a more theoretical and genuine Marxist science. However, this reduced the hegemony that the Party had over the interpretation of Marx. Yet according to Ranciere, "Marxist science had been set free from the authority of the Party only to become dependent instead on that of the pedagogue [Althusser or Althusser Hoxha]." (Davis, 2010, p.7). It is for this reason that Ranciere rejected Althusserianism, calling his first book *Althusser's Lesson*. Although this book appears to be an argument against pedagogy, it is in reality a critique of the political implications of the scientific outlook of Althusserianism.

After May 1968, Althusserianism seemed to Ranciere to be no more than a “pedagogy of delay” which held back the actual revolution thereby strengthening the present social and institutional privileges of its pedagogues. Ranciere holds that Althusserianism was no more than an attempt to exasperate the inequality between those who have mastered the intricacies of Marxist science and those who have not. This, according to Ranciere, was used to strengthen the authority of the teacher, who was in this case Althusser Hoxha (Davis, 2010, p.29). And this two-way relationship between student and teacher becomes “a one-way pedagogical relationship” in which the Marxist intellectuals give directions without which “the proletariat are condemned to spontaneous and aberrant, rather than properly revolutionary, action.” (Davis, 2010, p.13).

Althusser’s view of the instructional role of the elite vanguard of revolutionary intellectuals has a long history within the Marxist tradition, especially in the Leninist tradition, the vanguard party is the key word for such an understanding. For Marxist-Leninist theorists, the “working class were the embodiment of the future. However, they did not themselves have direct knowledge of their defining role in the historical process. For that they depended on intellectuals: as Ranciere put it parodically, ‘the workers need our scientific knowledge.’” (Ranciere, 1974, p.35 cited in Davis, 2010, p.14). Such a way of thinking can be called “scientism,” or as Zizek dubs it “theoreticist elitism.” Ranciere holds that scientism is not only concerned with providing privileges to intellectuals but also to continuously postpone the actual realization of achieving equality. More specifically, he believes that for both Marx and Althusser, through the use of the pedagogy of delay, that there would always be a knowledge deficit through which the intellectual gains the upper hand over the student and thereby both gain legitimacy and perpetually postpone the revolution (Davis, 2010, p.17).

According to Ranciere, even the slightest postponement for equality to be realized entails indefinite postponement. It is his proposition that for equality to be sincerely realized there mustn’t be even the slightest of hesitation in implementation. Moreover, its implementation must first and foremost be applied to the analytical approach taken to address questions of social justice. According to Ranciere, despite the fact that Marx, Sartre, Althusser, and Bourdieu are considered to be the “pillars of the left,” they are in fact a supporter of inequality and pedagogical privilege, just as Plato once did, in his well-known book *Republic*. In place of these four, he is a proponent of the pedagogy of “the ignorant (school) master,” namely Joseph Jacotot, as portrayed in Ranciere’s book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991 orig 1981) (Davis, 2010, p.25).

In this book, Ranciere describes the method of education Joseph Jacotot used that freed the minds of his “students,” or allowed their minds from falling prisoner to a broken system of hierarchy (stultification). Jacotot discovered, through happenstance, that he was able to teach subjects that he did not even know himself. Ranciere details to the reader Jacotot’s story while heavily emphasizing the aspect of “emancipation” and “stultification.”

Let me say a few words about the adventures of Jacotot. Jacotot was forced into exile after the Bourbon Restoration and found himself teaching French literature in today's Netherlands. However, he neither knew Flemish, nor did his students know French and was, as such, unable to follow the traditional way of professing his knowledge unto his students. Therefore, he distributed copies of a bilingual version of Fenelon's *Telemaque*. After the class finished the first half of the book, he had them repeat what they had read and then continue the remaining portion of the book. Afterwards, he asked the class to write about what they read, in French. What surprised Jacotot is that, although these students' native language was not French and he had not explained anything to them, they were able to express their ideas with an extreme amount of fluency. After such an experience, Jacotot was led to a general skepticism about the role of explanation. Ranciere articulates as follows:

Explanation is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world. It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such. To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid (Davis, 2010, p.6).

In other words, Ranciere's understanding of intellectual equality derived from Jacotot is an equality that must be presupposed, from the outset, in the pedagogical encounter, which must be declared and which must be verified in that encounter. In short, Jacotot's pedagogy is against the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student and instead to inspire students' will (Citton, 2010, p.27). This pedagogical formulation also has prominent influence on Ranciere's understanding of 'emancipation'. According to Ranciere, 'what an emancipated person can do is be an emancipator: to give, not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself.' (Ranciere, 1991, p.68 cited in Davis, 2010, p.27).

Both Alain Badiou and Todd May state that Ranciere's radical understanding of equality is "one of the most important defining and original features of his work and has implications far beyond the field of pedagogy in a narrow sense." Davis, 2010, p.27. Inspired by Ranciere, May divides equality into two: active and passive. Active equality is "a form of equality which the oppressed presume, declare and verify for themselves and which is to be distinguished from equality as conventionally understood," whereas passive equality "is given (or, more often, not given) by those in power." (May, 2008). In other words, equality, for Ranciere, "is created *by* people rather than *for* them." (May, 2010, p.70).

The reason that Jacotot's pedagogy gained such importance is because it presupposed that equality must exist at the onset of the teacher-student relation instead of as a result of being taught. As such, Jacotot's pedagogical experiment

opens the way for a new understanding of what equality truly is (Davis, 2010, p.30). It can therefore be said that “equality is a presupposition, an axiomatic point of departure, or it is nothing.” (Ranciere, 2007, p.xi cited in Davis, 2010, p.31).

Let me quote from Ranciere’s essay that was published in an editorial work of Zizek namely *The Idea of Communism*.

It is the logic of the pedagogical process in which the schoolmaster starts from the situation of ignorance which is that of the student and progressively replaces ignorance by knowledge and progressively takes the student away from a situation of inequality to lead him or her towards a situation of equality. It is also the logic of Enlightenment in which the cultivated elites have to guide the ignorant and superstitious lower classes in the path of progress. This is, Jacotot said, the way of infinite reproduction of inequality in the name of a promise of equality. The process leading the ignorant to science and the lower classes to modern life of republican progress is predicated in fact on the knowledge of ignorance. This is the inegalitarian principle. Its opposite, the egalitarian maxim can be summed up in two principles: firstly, equality is not a goal; it is a starting point, an opinion or a presupposition which opens the field of a possible verification. Secondly, intelligence is not divided, it is one. It is not the intelligence of the master or the intelligence of the student, the intelligence of the legislator or the intelligence of the artisan, etc. Instead it is the intelligence that does not fit any specific position in a social order but belongs to anybody as the intelligence of anybody. Emancipation then means: the appropriation of this intelligence which is one, and the verification of the potential of the equality of intelligence (Ranciere, 2010, pp.167-168).

In the same paper Ranciere also asserts that “emancipation means the communism of intelligence” (Ranciere, 2010, p.168). And without the communism of intelligence we all know and some of us experienced what communism resembles.

Now I want to deal with a well known figure from the perspective that I tried to explore, namely Enver Hoxha. The official biography of *Enver Hoxha: His Life and Work* is a publication of the Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies at the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania. The book starts with a commemorative essay written by Ramiz Ali. What Ramiz Ali writes about Enver Hoxha is a par excellence example of that Ranciere called Platonic or philosophical gesture:

The name of the Enver Hoxha is inseparable from that of the Party which he created and led for nearly half a century. When Albania was at the crossroads of history, when the very existence of the Albanian people and nation had been placed in doubt, many Albanians felt the gravity of the situation, but those who were able to see the coming days of freedom and prosperity beyond the black enslavement were few indeed... Enver Hoxha was the first who saw the essential need for the creation of the Communist Party as the key link to save the Homeland and bring the people into light (Alia, 1986, p.5).

And again what Ramiz Ali writes about Enver Hoxha shows that Enver was perceived as the “eternal school master”:

The present and future generations will be guided by his teachings. Faced with any major question, faced with any difficulty or obstacle, they will seek the advice of Enver. And Enver will assist them. He will give them answers through his work (Alia, 1986, p.10).

One can easily say that these quotations are from a commemorative essay and it is understandable that his successor had to praise him. But the way Ramiz praises Enver Hoxha tells us more on how their, the communist elite I mean, relation with knowledge was. There was no sign of a dialog but a monolog. “Those who have knowledge” thus stand in a one-way pedagogical relationship to the proletariat. It can be asserted, in light of Plato’s *Republic*, that “those who know” (theologians, philosophers, central committee of the party) have since given themselves the sole right to dictate political authority as they believe themselves to be the “owners” of a sort of superior knowledge. Due to this supposed ownership Ranciere puts forth the understanding, through Jacotot, that the “explainer tends to stultify the explainee due to the structural inequality of the explanatory model.” Therefore, “‘those who know’ tends to kill the democratic process because of the very position from which he pretends to enlighten it. No matter how well intended or knowledgeable he may be in his disciplinary field, the expert represents a potential threat to democratic politics in so far as his very enunciation divides the citizenry in two: those who have the knowledge (and who are entitled to command), and those who lack the knowledge (and must therefore obey).” (Citton, 2010, p.29). But let me make my argument clear. I do not denounce “‘those who have knowledge”, but those who let their expert knowledge become a tool for silencing the claims and resistance expressed by “the ignorant ones”. (Citton, 2010, p.30).

Let me quote from some of Enver Hoxha’s own works. About the events in Iran Enver Hoxha writes on January 14, 1979 that:

Many intrigues will be hatched up so as to prevent this revolution from carrying out deep-going reforms. In this very important strategic country it will still take a long time for the people to become even more conscious of their great strength and this consciousness must be created by a genuine Marxist-Leninist party (Enver Hoxha, 1984, p.211).

And again about Iran he writes January 1980 as following:

The Iranian Marxist-Leninists must, in particular, submit the strength and orientations of the working class to Marxist-Leninist analysis and then their party must base its activity on this analysis, go among the working class, educate it and clarify it politically and ideologically, while tempering itself together with the working class struggle which, far from being ended, has only begun and will certainly assume diverse aspects (Enver Hoxha, 1984, p.379).

He also says that:

The Marxist-Leninists must teach the people to assess the events that are taking place in the light of dialectical and historical materialism (Enver Hoxha, 1984, p.380).

Let me quote from another book of Enver Hoxha that highlights his understanding of vanguard party:

Marxism-Leninism teaches us that the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie builds up continuously and will certainly be crowned with the victory of the proletariat and its allies. But for this struggle to be crowned with success, the proletariat must be organized, must have its vanguard party, must make the broad masses of the people conscious of the necessity for revolution, and lead them in the fight to seize state power, to establish its own dictatorship, to build socialism and communism, the classless society (Enver Hoxha, 1979, pp.142-143).

Another example from many others which indicates the role he assigns to intellectuals, or party cadres:

The duty of revolutionaries, progressives, and patriots in the countries with a low level of socio-economic development and dependent on the imperialist and social-imperialist powers is to make the peoples conscious of this oppression and exploitation, to educate, mobilize and organize them and hurl them into the liberation struggle (Enver Hoxha, 1979, pp.201).

Before I finish let me give another example in which Enver determines who are capable and who are not:

The organization of the masses of the youth is of special importance to the Marxist-Leninist parties. The role of the youth in the revolutionary movements has always been great. From its very nature the youth is for the new and against the old, and shows itself ready to fight for the triumph of everything progressive, revolutionary. However, on its own, it is incapable of finding the right road (Enver Hoxha, 1979, pp.232).

To sum up, Jacotot's pedagogical experiment opens the way for a new understanding of what equality truly is. It is, in a narrow sense, not only a pedagogical anti-method but also a new way of looking at politics and society. Inspired by Jacotot, and of course the understanding of equality implicit in May of 1968, Ranciere formulates his radical conception of equality as not an end but a presupposition or an axiomatic point of departure. Otherwise equality is meaningless and nothing more than an empty word.

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