

# The Postmodern Fallacy of the Emancipatory Ignorant Schoolmaster

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*A hagiography is a type of biography that puts the subject in a very flattering light. Hagiographies are often about saints. The two halves of hagiography refer to holiness and writing, and it is something written about holy people.*

<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/hagiography>

*Neither relativists, sceptics, nihilists, sociologists of “knowledge” nor the postmodernists successfully debunk the claims of rational explanation, far from it: these theorists presuppose much of the theory of methodology they deny. (Nola, 2003)*

<http://www.philo-sophos.de/131583.htm>

**Abstract:** *The combination of prior normative education and very favourable circumstances, which included the lexicogrammar similarity with Dutch, allowed the students in Jacotot’s class to learn to read French on their own. Comparison with more remote languages shows that “explications” would have been indispensable. These conclusions agree with the literature that states that to learn with minimal instructional guidance, the student should first acquire task-specific knowledge and skills, questioning both, the Ignorant Schoolmaster’s emancipatory role, and the characterization of explications as “stultifying”, and “subordinating”. Jacotot’s hypothesis behind equal intelligence is negated by cognitive science, which shows that learning at school age involves a conscious process, unrelated to the infant’s acquisition of the mother tongue. Contrary to the Panecastian postulates subordinating intellectual emancipation to experiential, unchecked self-learning, it is argued that the transmission of objective knowledge from the teacher to the students, being epistemically democratic, leads to emancipation, in the school, by enabling the development of critical and inquiring minds.*

**Key-words:** *Intellectual Emancipation, Objective Knowledge, Enlightenment, Post-Modernism, Stultifying, Panecastic.*

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# La Falacia Postmoderna del Maestro Ignorante y Emancipador

## **Resumen**

*La combinación de educación normativa previa y circunstancias sumamente favorables, incluyendo la similitud léxico-gramatical con el holandés, permitió a los alumnos de la clase de Jacotot aprender a leer francés sin ayuda. Comparación con lenguajes remotos evidencia que “explicaciones” hubiesen sido imprescindibles. Estas conclusiones se alinean con la literatura que indica que para aprender con un mínimo de guía externa los estudiantes deben poseer suficiente conocimiento y experiencia previa, ambos específicos, cuestionando tanto el rol “emancipador” del Maestro Ignorante como la caracterización de las explicaciones como “atontantes”, “embrutecedoras” o “subordinantes”. La hipótesis detrás de las inteligencias iguales es negada por la ciencia cognitiva, que muestra que el aprendizaje en la edad escolar es un proceso consciente, sin relación con la adquisición de la lengua materna en el infante. Contra los postulados panecásticos que supeditan la emancipación intelectual al autoaprendizaje sin referentes objetivos, se argumenta que la transmisión de conocimiento objetivo del docente a sus alumnos, siendo epistémicamente democrática, conduce a la emancipación, en la escuela, al permitir el desarrollo de mentes críticas e indagatorias.*

**Palabras clave:** *Emancipación Intelectual, Conocimiento Objetivo, Iluminismo, Postmodernidad, Atontante, Panecástica.*

## Introduction

Robert Nola (2003)(p. 365,459), in his book “Rescuing Reason”, makes reference to the extraordinary influence that Michel Foucault exerts on the human sciences through a doctrine that asserts that knowledge is subordinate to power, and vice-versa. Nola remarks that much of the commentary on Foucault is hagiographic, partly because of the ambiguities of his doctrine, which few of his followers attempt to clarify, and partly because of his contagious mistrust of notions like truth and rationality. This mistrust has strongly influenced postmodernism, which takes a critical stance towards the Enlightenment’s intellectual values,<sup>1</sup> and particularly against the normativity of objectivist and scientific thought. Despite its popularity, the vicious circle behind Foucault’s logic remains unscathed: if all forms of knowledge are the result of circumstantial powers, what prevents his doctrine from being another historically arbitrary, subjugated and subjugating creation?

Jacques Rancière (1991), and the “*Jacotot Method of Universal Teaching*” and the Panecastic doctrine described in “*The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*”, (TIS in what follows), enjoy a comparable popularity in the educational sciences, to a large extent due to their consistencies with Foucault, see, *e.g.*, Badiou (2009); Barros (2010); Benetto (2017); Beraldi (2009); Biesta (2008); Colella (2012); Dussel and Skliar (2015); Fallas Vargas (2016); Frigerio (2008a); Greco (2007a, 2007b); Harris (2015); Luna (2017); Mey (2013); Petrucci (2010); Ross (2009); Sardi (2017); Skliar (2005); Tello (2005).

Through the Panecastic doctrine, Rancière adopts a critical stance upon the Enlightenment’s normative rationalism. By denying the possibility of accessing a human-independent reality, Rancière aligns his doctrine with radical forms of constructivism to assert that the students’ intellectual emancipation is only possible through unchecked, experiential self-learning. Explications, intellectual consensus and the social verification of knowledge, by/with the teacher or other individuals, are belittled as “*stultifying*”,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Enlightenment’ is understood in historical/epistemological terms according to Goldstein (2015) and Nola (2017).

externally imposed forms of “*coincidence stultification*”, or “*a disturbance that suspends liberty*”. In this view, the Enlightenment’s normative school, under the pretense of “*promoting equality through instruction*”, ends up “*subordinating*” the students to the pre-established “*explicative order*”, hence deferring their intellectual emancipation “*until the end of time*”. As a liberating alternative, Rancière argues that equality should be a “*preliminary*” and a “*practice rather than a reward*”. Learning must be intuitive and spontaneous, similar to that of the mother tongue, as expected since, he argues, all intelligences, hence individuals, are equal. The Schoolmaster’s role should, therefore, be restricted to that of “*Ignorant*”, or “*Facilitator of Learning*”.

The origin of the Jacotot Method of Universal Teaching, and the principles of the Panecastic doctrine are described next, followed by a critical discussion, formulated adopting an objectivist point of view. Literal quotes have been mostly restricted to Argentinian authors as a contribution to the local debate, but similar references of diverse origin can easily be found in the international forums.

### **The Jacotot Method and the Panecastic Doctrine**

Through TIS (pp.1-10), Rancière recounts an intellectual experience of Joseph Jacotot (JJT), a Lecturer in French Literature, which took place at the University of Louvain in 1818. Faced with the need to teach to students that spoke Flemish, a variety of Dutch that he did not know, JJT took advantage of a bilingual edition of Fenelon’s classic novel, *Telemaque*. Timely printed in both languages, in opposite pages, this book created a “*minimal link of a thing in common*” with his students. They were thus “*asked to learn the French text with the help of the translation*”. Once the first half was covered, he had them repeat and memorize what they had learned while completing the book. At the end of the exercise, the class “*exceeded his expectations*”: his students wrote — and apparently also spoke — French, “*as well as many French could have done!*”

The fact that his students had learned by themselves, with no “*explications of the roots and flexions of the French language*”, led JJT to conclude that the teacher’s role is

mostly superfluous, questioning his own attitude of “*master explicator*” derived from the Enlightenment’s normativity.

According to Rancière:

*The revelation that came to Joseph Jacotot amounts to this: the logic of the explicative system had to be overturned.*

*It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such.*

*The 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.*

*On the one hand, he decrees the absolute beginning. On the other, having thrown a veil of ignorance over everything that is to be learned, he appoints himself to the task of lifting it.*

*The pedagogical myth, [...] says that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one. The former registers perceptions by chance, retains them, interprets and repeats them empirically, within the closed circle of habit and need. This is the intelligence of the young child and the common man. The superior intelligence knows things by reason, proceeds by method, from the simple to the complex, from the part to the whole... Such is the principle of explication. Such will be the principle of enforced stultification.*

*The stultifier [...], he is all the more efficacious because he is knowledgeable, enlightened, and of good faith.*

JJT thus proposed, as an alternative to the Enlightenment’s normative pedagogy, the (p.110) “*Jacotot Method*” of “*Universal Teaching*”, of emancipatory character, and totalizing, or Panecastic, nature, centred on unchecked self-learning, and based on four principles (pp.18,41,135,139):

*1 - All men have equal intelligence;*

*2- God created the human soul capable of teaching itself by itself, and without a master;*

*3 - One can teach what one doesn't know;*

*4 - Everything is in everything.*

These principles imply that: (1) people differ only in the intention or desire to use their intelligence, not in their ability; (2), (3) anyone can act as a (Romero Frías & Magro Mazo, 2016) “*Facilitator of Learning*”; (4) any kind of wisdom carries in itself universal knowledge. It follows that the poor and the excluded —the least educated in society — have no reasons to rely on experts for their education: they can learn by themselves what they want, and thus secure their intellectual emancipation.

According to Rancière and his followers, the Jacotot Method, abandoned (p.138) shortly after JJJ's death, is the right way of teaching/learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is so because of its personal emancipatory features, which defy the uncertainty of the future in an increasingly technocratic and inequalitarian society. (Castillo Villapudua, 2018; Colella, 2014a; Croci, 2015; Crockett, 2012; Dussel, 2003; Frigerio, 2008b; Greco, 2007b; Luna, 2017; Martinis, 2006; Mey, 2013; Pineau, 2008; Romero Frías & Magro Mazo, 2016; Samper Richard, 2019; Southwell, 2013; Steimbregger, 2017) Despite sounding attractive, these assertions hardly go beyond declamation due to the quasi-evangelizing character of the emancipation envisioned by JJJ (pp.13,18) (see also Colella (2014b) and Antonelli (2009)):

*...it was a benefit to be announced to the poor.*

*Emancipation shall be called [...] the act of an intelligence that obeys only itself, even if the will obeys another will.*

*Those who emancipate must not worry about what the emancipated must learn. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe.*

Its strictly personal nature confers his emancipation a strongly anti-institutional character (pp.99-105):

*Only a man can emancipate a man.*

*No party or government, no army, school, or institution, will ever emancipate a single person.*

*The nation would soon be emancipated, not with the emancipation given by scholars, by their explications at the level of the people's intelligence, but with the emancipation seized, even against the scholars, when one teaches oneself.*

Rancière/JJT complete the description of their doctrine in deconstructive-Nietzschean<sup>2</sup> terms, relativizing the existence of an objective, unique, external and accessible reality (p.138):

*Seek the truth and you will not find it, knock at its door and it will not open to you, but that search will serve you in learning to do [...] Stop drinking at that fountain, but don't, for all that, stop trying to drink [...] Come and we will make our poetry. Long live the Panecastic philosophy!*

*It's a storyteller who never runs out of stories. It gives itself over to the pleasure of the imagination without having to settle accounts with the truth. It sees that veiled figure only beneath the travesties that hide it. It is content to see those masks, to analyse them, without being tormented by the countenance underneath. The Old Master<sup>3</sup> is never content. He lifts up a mask, rejoices, but his joy doesn't last long; he soon perceives that the mask he has taken off covers another one, and so on until the end of all truth-seekers. The lifting of those superimposed masks is what we call the history of philosophy.*

*Oh! The beautiful history! I like the Panecastic stories better.*

As with Foucault, the commentary on Rancière/JJT is typically hagiographic, aimed at questioning the Enlightenment's educational normativity rather than at verifying the assertions, or clarifying the ambiguities of the Panecastic doctrine. In Foucaultian tone, TIS is described challenging the allegedly subordinating powers of objective knowledge and formal education:

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<sup>2</sup> The connection with Nietzsche is usual, see, e.g.: Antelo (2003, 2010); Badiou (2009); Beraldi (2009); Cerletti (2008); Chantefort (2014); Colella (2014a); Crockett (2012); Nancy (2009); Petrucci (2010); Skliar (2005); (Steimbregger, 2019); Tello (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Old Master: "Explicator of the old method" (p.15).

Cerletti (2003): *[...] it shakes the basis of the supposedly emancipatory policies. [...] a disruption, an annoying noise in the good order of the prevailing state of affairs, impossible to be heard from the normality.*

Antelo (2003): *Socratism is a perfected form of stultification. A midwife lives inside every stultifier. Those locksmiths who have access to knowledge, to that key, will practice the art of infinite procrastination.*

Dussel (2003): *[...] he does not want to educate his students to be academics seeking the truth; what is important is that they become free subjects, with an emancipated intelligence.*

Baquero (2007): *[...] one can attribute to the stultification power of the school system much of the representations that the subjects have about their own incompetence.*

Tello (2005): *Whoever approaches the text [...] embarks on an expedition that can lead him to become aware of the cruel reality of the current educational systems born with the beginning of the modernity, or may end up ignoring their postulates.*

Skliar (2003): *The master explicator concealed his life behind his explication. The student imprisoned by the explication [...] hides his own life behind his apparent and ephemeral understanding.*

Greco (2007a): *A scene that makes possible what is impossible, the teacher-student equality, [...] the students' appropriation of the word.*

Frigerio (2008b): *A professor [...] shocked the pedagogical community. He said [...]: all men have equal intelligence. With that statement [...] the pedagogy could be labelled as stultifying when it confused itself with the source of all explication.*

Barros (2010): *The pedagogical myth moves on the basis of the principle of stultification.*

Petrucci (2010): *The asymmetric relationship —linked to the teacher's knowledge— can sustain the 'pedagogical myth' of the inequality of intelligence, [...] it undermines the emancipatory possibilities.*

Colella (2012): *Any authority claiming the 'last word', would be tilting the balance toward itself (in this case, toward objective knowledge mediated through the*



*authorized voice) in detriment of the subjective intervention of the non-authorized 'other', that is, of those who learn.*

Gago and Sztulwark (2012): *Who can deny having dreamed of emancipation without having done so in the language of stultification, the one that believes in the transmission of knowledge from one to the other?*

Koira (2015): *This process of didactic transposition was created in the cultural matrix of the Enlightenment [...] the teacher speaks for all, explains [...] he constitutes himself into the 'explicative order'.*

Croci (2015): *A revolutionary concept [...], an idea that goes against what seems to guide the educational system.*

Luna (2017): *There are teaching practices that [...] disrupt [...] the prerogatives of the dominant temporality.*

Sardi (2017): *In the [...] public school [...] the evaluative dimension is given priority [...] over the proper appropriation of knowledge. The teacher [...] is proud of making the students understand the knowledge that he considers relevant, transmits his personal knowledge and points of view.*

del Valle (2017): *[...] shed light onto the very strangeness of the pedagogical relationship and because in its depth lies [...] a new oxymoron: 'order and progress'.*

D'Iorio (2018): *If the master explicator only confirms incapacities, the question that opens, then, is about the very destiny of the Magisterium.*

The following turns to the particular circumstances surrounding JJT's class, and which led to the Jacotot Method and the Panecastic Doctrine. Seen under the joint lights of instructivist pedagogy and the nativist theory of language acquisition, the Ignorant Schoolmaster's *facilitating* role and the postulates of the Doctrine appear either factually conditioned, or logically contradictory/biased. Against Rancière/JJT's subjective notion of emancipation through experiential, unchecked self-learning, it is argued that only formal education leads to intellectual emancipation, by enabling the creation of critical and inquiring minds, on an objective, socially verifiable basis.

## Discussion

The issues to be considered are sorted as follows:

- **Pedagogy and Epistemology:** *Circumstances; Falsifying; Novices vs. Veterans; Ignorant Schoolmasters; Current Examples; Mother Tongue and Equality of Intelligence.*
  
- **Intellectual Emancipation:** *Objective vs. Empirical/Existential/Aesthetic Knowledge; Personal vs. Institutional Emancipation; Subjective vs. Objective Emancipation.*

## Pedagogy and Epistemology

### *Circumstances*

JJT starts from a factual observation ((p.12): “*The students had learned without a master explicator, but not, for all that, without a master*”), aimed at supporting, *prima facie*, the subjective hypothesis at the core of his doctrine: his *facilitating* character made possible his students’ intellectual emancipation, manifest by their overly rapid and independent learning of the new language. The acceptance of his hypothesis is evident in the literature: “*It was Jacotot's action of telling them that they were able to learn on their own, what opened the way for them*” (Dussel, 2003); “*The master patiently (waits) for the result of the experience, [...] he does not immerse himself into it*” (Skliar, 2003). However, being post-factual (*post-hoc, ergo propter hoc*<sup>4</sup>), the hypothesis and its interpretations are all questionable, given that:

- There is no record in the initial instructions of any specific intentions, something already pointed out in the literature: “*He does not talk to the students even to get in touch with them*”. (Nozica, 2012)(p.276)

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<sup>4</sup> Latin: ‘After this, therefore because of this’. JJT (p.4) uses this quote to assert that the Enlightenment’s rationalism falsely justifies, ‘a posteriori’, the ‘explicatory order’, according to which “one must first acquire a solid and methodical foundation before the singularities of genius could take flight”.

- They were neither independently verified,<sup>5</sup> nor subject to any form of falsifying test.<sup>6</sup>

The below list highlights the circumstances particular to JJT's class, and which show that the success of the experience was to be expected, but for reasons that place the combination of prior education and favourable circumstances well above his "*facilitating*" role. The falsifying tests, discussed later, show that the Jacotot Method lacks the general character ascribed to it.<sup>7</sup>

1. His students were all well-educated young adults, and with an explicit interest in French Literature. It can be assumed that besides reading and writing Flemish, they possessed a formal knowledge of its grammar.

2. The fact that JJT was in charge of the class at (p.2) the request of his students despite his public ignorance of Flemish, places bounds to his characterization as "*Ignorant*".

3. French and Flemish share a high lexicogrammar similarity (see the *Falsifying* section). The availability of the printed bilingual version of *Telemaque* suggests that self-learning French by the 'Jacotot Method' was already usual in Belgium.

4. A high degree of familiarity with French on the side of his students cannot be ruled out.

Point #4 deserves a detailed justification. The University of Louvain is described in its own website as "*Belgium's largest French-speaking University*". At 50 km from the

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<sup>5</sup> JJT (p.15) claims to have verified his method by teaching "two subjects at which he was notably incompetent: painting and the piano". Being skills involving little intellectual elaboration, they cannot be considered equivalent to his class.

<sup>6</sup> 'Falsifying' implies, following Karl Popper, that in order to be credible a hypothesis must include an element of risk by which it can eventually be proved invalid, see, e.g.: Okasha (2002)(p.13), Klimovsky (1995)(p.27).

<sup>7</sup> Despite positing his class's factual success in support of his 'Universal Teaching Method', JJT adds a subjective condition, ad-hoc, to prevent its objective verification, or its falsifying (p.27): "It is a matter of daring to be adventurous, and not whether one learns more or less well or more or less quickly. The 'Jacotot Method' is not better; it is different."

border with France, it is within the Walloon Region, where French, one of Belgium's three official languages, has historically been dominant. Indeed, part of the class spoke French ((p.1): "*a good number of (his) students did not speak French*"). It can then be assumed that many of them had had intense prior contact with French, something already pointed out, among others, by Nozica (2012)(p.276). This would help explain why, in such a short time, they could both write, and speak it. TIS is characteristically ambiguous in this regard: initially, it mentions only the writing (p.2): "*he asked the students to write in French what they thought*", but then it makes explicit that (p.9): "*his students had learned to speak and to write in French*". That they could also speak it is not a minor point: JJT uses it to argue that all forms of personal (or emancipatory) learning are similar to that of the mother tongue (pp.9,10,18), hence his postulate: "*all men have equal intelligence*".

Points #1, #3 and #4 make evident that the combination of high and specific educational level (reading, writing, grammar) and very favourable circumstances (lexicogrammar similarity, cultural/geographic proximity, availability of the bilingual text) enabled his students to devote themselves to learning the new language without any needs for external help, or explications, nor of being reassured that they could do so on their own. These arguments are expanded in the next sections.

### *Falsifying*

Table I compares literal translations of a sentence in English to five alphabetic languages, of which four are Indo-European (Spanish, French, Dutch, and Indonesian) and one Afro-Asian (Arabic), and to a non-alphabetic one (Japanese). Parallel translations of more sophisticated texts can be compared in (English-Dutch) FlemishReading (2019) and (Tibetan-English) Okasha (2002). The characterization of languages was taken from Dryer and Haspelmath (2013).

The lexicogrammar similarity between the four European languages turns immediate where the computer's translation in Table 1 is incorrect. The comparison with Indonesian is more difficult, becoming impossible with Arabic in spite of its alphabetic character, as with Japanese. In practical terms: the interrelationship between closely related languages

requires only a dictionary for those who master at least one of them and have a formal knowledge of its grammar. Should the new language be remote, additional specific knowledge, or qualified external help, becomes necessary, when not essential, especially if learning is to occur within a limited period of time. It goes without saying that in the case of a remote language, help regarding phonetics would be unavoidable if the students were to speak it as JJT's class did with French.

*Table I: Direct and (Reverse) literal Translations of the English sentence into the languages of the first column, obtained with GoogleTranlate.*

<b>Language</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>(Reverse)</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>One flew over the cuckoo's nest</b>	<b>(One flew over the cuckoo's nest)</b>
Spanish	Alguien voló sobre el nido del cuco	(One Flew Over The Cuckoo's nest)
French	Vol au-dessus d'un nid de coucou	(Flew over a cuckoo's nest)
Dutch	Een vloog over het koekoeksnest	(One flew over the bird's nest)
Indonesian	Salah satu terbang di atas sarang burung	(One flies over a cuckoo nest)
Arabic	واحد طار فوق عش الوقواق	(One flew over the cuckoo's nest)
Japanese	カッコーの巣の上で	(On the cuckoo's nest)

The examples of Table 1 show that the fundamental hypothesis of the Panecastic doctrine —an Ignorant (or facilitating) Schoolmaster is necessary and sufficient for independent learning, *i.e.*, for the students' intellectual emancipation— fails the falsifying

test of remote languages: explications are sometimes necessary, when not essential.<sup>8</sup> In other words, JJT's question, (p.2): "*Was Wanting all that was necessary for Doing?*" admits only a conditioning answer: "*Doing*" presupposes having the right tools at hand, in this case 'knowing how to read and write, and having formal knowledge of the grammar of, a language close to the new one.' Possessing such intellectual capabilities automatically classifies JJT's students as *veterans* for the task at hand, as argued in the next section. Other possible falsifying tests are considered under *Current Examples*.

### *Novices vs. Veterans*

According to JJT (p.9), the success of his class was exclusively due to the fact that

*He hadn't even proceeded in the fashion of those reformer pedagogues who mislead their students the better to guide them [...]. He had left them alone with the text by Fenelon, — and their will to learn French,*

a disputable causal claim under the circumstances, as already argued. In more formal terms, the issue to consider is whether, in line with current radical constructivist pedagogies, learning is better/deeper/authentic/emancipatory exclusively through personal discovery and experience, or, alternatively, and according to instructivist pedagogies, it is so under the detailed guidance (or explications) of a qualified teacher acting as objective referent. This controversy, which is hardly new (see, *e.g.*: Kozloff (1998); M. R. Matthews (1998),(2012); P. S. C. Matthews (1997); Nola (1998)), has already been settled by cognitive science.

The comprehensive works by Clark *et al.*, (2012), Kalyuga *et al.* (2003), and Kirschner *et al.* (2006) show that learning with minimal guidance, in environments where the students must discover essential concepts or develop intellectual skills by themselves, can be pedagogically inefficient: at the initial levels this method often leads to conceptual errors and frustration. Once the students develop enough specific skills, they become able

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<sup>8</sup> *The deciphering of the Mayan hieroglyphics, whose meaning was lost after the Spanish conquest, would be an even more extreme example: after more than 200 years of effort, the interpretation only covers 90% of the symbols.(NOVA, 2008) This constitutes incontrovertible proof of the need for qualified external help, or of joint intellectual efforts, to understand a remote language. According to JJT (p. 10), this deciphering should occur automatically, regardless of the language.*

to solve advanced problems on their own. It is thus possible to sort students as either *novices*, *i.e.*, those requiring detailed explicit instructions, or *veterans*, *i.e.*, those already able to progress with minimal supervision. This differentiation reflects the way the human brain operates, involving either the short- or the long-term memories. The first, or short-term, as part of the conscious activity, can only handle a very limited number of variables, contrary to the second, or long-term, whose capacity is virtually unlimited.

The long-term memory is dominant in solving complex problems because solutions are already accumulated there, in the form of previous experiences. (Clark *et al.* (2012) support their conclusions making reference to studies of chess games showing that experienced players have several thousand of possible moves and gambits in their memories, ready to be used with little additional conscious elaboration.) In the case of novice students facing a challenging problem, the lack of specific experiences leads them to wander randomly, frustrated, unable to move forward<sup>9</sup>. External help prevents this situation, with two desirable pedagogical effects: it boosts the student's self-esteem, and helps her to accumulate useful experiences for the future.

The prior and specific normative education and the familiarity with the new language necessarily would have qualified JJT's students as veterans, *i.e.*, they were already 'emancipated' in relation to learning by themselves a language close to their own, as already argued.<sup>10</sup> For the same reasons, extending the Jacotot Method to the lower educational levels is simply not defensible: the younger or less educated/experienced—*i.e.*, the more novice—the student, the more necessary the guide/explications become. JJT eschews this obvious pedagogical contradiction by asserting that self-learning is similar to the acquisition of the mother tongue. Being spontaneous, it would also interrupt the "*regression ad infinitum*" of the "*explicative order*" implicit, according to JJT (pp.4,5), in the Enlightenment's normative pedagogy. See the section *Mother Tongue* for further details.

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<sup>9</sup> Similar conclusions have been pointed out concerning the acquisition of non-intuitive knowledge, see the discussion about Piaget's theory in Nola (1998)(p.69). See also: (Nola & Irzik, 2005)(SECTION 2.5).

<sup>10</sup> Another possible falsifying test for the Jacotot method would be solving a different/more advanced problem, as is commonly practiced under normative teaching, in the form of bachelor, master or doctoral level theses. The common practice of this form of intellectual emancipation is ignored by Rancière and followers, possibly for being, in JJT's vision, "*a posteriori*", see footnote # 4.

In JJT's view, any child presented with a book should be able to relate the written text to the spoken language with no need for help, or explications, (p.10): "*the intelligence that had allowed them to learn [...] French in Telemaque [...] was the same they had used to learn their mother tongue*". The hypothesis is extended to mathematics (pp.27,8): "*The same intelligence makes nouns and mathematical signs [...] it also makes signs and reasonings*"; "*There is always something the ignorant one knows that can be used as a point of comparison*". The father of the child in these examples, emancipated despite being illiterate, would fulfil the Ignorant Schoolmaster's role exercising his natural authority (pp.13,31) "*to set him on track and keep him there*". "*He will not verify what the student has found*", rather, that he "*has studied attentively*". The extreme voluntarism of these assertions only makes more obvious the utopian nature of the Jacotot Method.

Adapted to more realistic teaching/learning conditions, the Jacotot Method would take the form:

- In the case of novice students, detailed guidance and explications are essential.
- Veteran students may be offered the option of studying/solving advanced problems by themselves.
- Being the objective referent of all knowledge/methods to acquire/apply, the teacher should be expert in the subject to teach,<sup>11</sup> and should be actively involved in all cases.

With these changes, any differences with the Enlightenment's normative pedagogy disappear.

Recognizing the *novices/veterans* difference does not deny, as claimed in the literature (Frigerio, 2008b) "*that the other can learn where we ignore, learn beyond our intent to share knowledge*". On the contrary, recognising this inherent feature of *human nature*<sup>12</sup> guarantees that all students, regardless of how intelligent they are, follow the

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<sup>11</sup> Consistently with the idea that knowledge is 'mentally constructed from personal experience' rather than transferred, claiming that the teacher does not need to be an expert in the topic characterizes educational constructivism. For critical discussions see: Kragh (1998); M. R. Matthews (1998); Nola (1998).

<sup>12</sup> 'Human nature' must be understood in biological terms according to Chomsky in Chomsky and Foucault (1971)(pp.2-3) and Chomsky (2007)(Ch.3). See also Hauser et al. (2014).



right path to arrive safely and self-confidently to the right place, in due time. Rather than *stultify*, or *subjugate* to the *explicative order*, explications democratise the classroom by *helping* those that need it the most.

The above conclusions can be expressed as an Enlightenment's premise following Goldstein (2015) and Nola (2017): "*Whatever can be known by one person can, in principle, be known by all, as long as they master the techniques for knowing that are relevant to a field*". In pedagogical terms, and against claims by JJT's supporters (e.g., Sardi (2017): *The teacher is proud of*[... transmitting] *his personal knowledge and points of view*), the premise takes the form: objective knowledge (e.g.: "*the earth is round and revolves around the sun subject to gravity*") is nobody's personal property, hence its transfer from the teacher to the student is, necessarily, epistemically democratic.

### *Ignorant Schoolmasters*

As with most of TIS's fundamental concepts, the definition of *Ignorant* is so broad that it contradicts itself.

JJT's extensive teaching experience was reflected by his detailed instructivist method: use of the bilingual novel, memorizing through translating/repeating, periodic meetings and final evaluation (JJT rather uses the word "*verification*"). It was already mentioned that he was in charge of the class by explicit request from his students: for them, far more than a mere "*facilitator*", only unable to speak Flemish, he was a sophisticated, objective referent of the language to be learnt. At the other end, being illiterate, the parents of the preceding section could not even *verify* whether the students actually learnt any French. Indeed, JJT recognises they could only play a disciplinary-moralistic role, evidencing how arbitrary his definition of Ignorant Schoolmaster is. This inconsistency is pointed out in the literature, either critically, (e.g.: Izzi (2017) recognises the need for the teacher's role as objective referent), or justified through subjective conditions, *ad-hoc* (see, e.g.: Harris (2015); Nozica (2012); Steimbregger (2019)).

### *Current Examples*

Contrary to claims by Rancière and followers (Frigerio, 2008b; Greco, 2007b), current examples of the *Jacotot Method* abound,<sup>13</sup> and not just regarding the learning of languages. The results of these examples, described below, invariably diverge from what should be expected according to JJT, providing further evidence of his learning method's failure to pass independent verifications.

Despite its apparent historicism, published in 1987, TIS is a book aimed at the present times. The point to highlight is that since the 1950's, international students have been an increasing feature of universities across Europe, North America, Australia/New Zealand, Japan, etc., and where they may account for up to 40% of the student population. (TimesHigherEducation, 2018) These students come in different proportions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. They are normally offered courses to help them learn the local language, given by teachers who do not speak their pupils' native languages. And, as in JJT's class, these students have a strong practical need of learning their Ignorant Schoolmaster's own language. In fewer words: the situation of JJT's students in the 1818 Belgium is closely mirrored by the current international students, something Rancière and followers overlook.<sup>14</sup> These close similarities, however, do not lead to the same degree of success: the participants rarely learn the new language at the level of their respective mother tongue. This observation, and the conclusions from Table 1, are supported by studies (Isphording (2015); FSI (2019)) on the learning of new languages by immigrants: the learning is faster when their own language is close to the new one, and the higher their level of education.

Further examples are the free courses available on the Internet (MOOC's).<sup>15</sup> These courses scarcely graduate more than 5% of the enrolled students. (HarvardX, 2018) The desertion is accentuated when the courses are conceived following constructivist methodologies, thus constituting notorious examples of massive frustration due to lack of

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<sup>13</sup> *Table 1 could be considered a fitting example, and 'Google Translate' could thus be labelled 'XXI Century Jacotot Method'.*

<sup>14</sup> *Many of JJT's followers have degrees obtained in the US or Europe. It seems unlikely that they did not notice, let alone participated, in these courses.*

<sup>15</sup> *"Massive Open Online Courses".*

guidance in excessively ambitious learning circumstances, as expected according to the *novices/veterans* distinction. For a detailed discussion, see Clark and Feldon (2004).

For his own credit, JTT took full advantage of the favourable circumstances surrounding his class, but he failed to recognise that the students' prior normative education made his success possible. The falsifying tests, and the *novices/veterans* argument, dispute his claims over the Ignorant Schoolmaster's determining role as much as the hagiographic comments it attracts, e.g., (Dussel, 2003): "*to the pedagogues' horror: you don't need to know in order to teach*". Under the extremely favourable circumstances, *horrifying* would have been should they had not learned French on their own (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup>

### *Mother Tongue and Equality of Intelligence*

JTT's doctrine assumes that all forms of infant learning, starting with the mother tongue, are progressive constructions through trial and error, controlled by a general intelligence (TIS (p.5, 10)): "*They hear and retain, imitate and repeat, make mistakes and correct themselves, succeed by chance and begin again methodically*". Such presumption is consistent with Jean Piaget's psychological constructivism, something already pointed out by JTT's supporters (Romero Frías & Magro Mazo, 2016). This fundamental assumption of Piaget's theory, hence of JTT's, is denied by the current cognitive science, as shown below. (A detailed discussion is in P. S. C. Matthews (1997). See also Chomsky (2007)(Ch.4); Nola (1998); Hauser *et al.* (2014))

- (i) The linguistic research of the last 50 years denies validity to Piaget's hypothesis on the basis of highly convincing evidence, such as that of children of very low IQ able to compose grammatically correct phrases but lacking any logic, in an extreme case in 20 different languages.
- (ii) The empirical evidence favours Noam Chomsky's nativist theory, which stipulates that the ability to acquire the mother tongue is innate and modular or specific: the

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<sup>16</sup> *It seems pertinent to paraphrase the entire statement: "To the Panecasticians' horror, the students had already been intellectually emancipated by their previous normative education".*

child is born with a universal grammar genetically inscribed. Exposure to the family language activates the spontaneous learning, and the creativity inherent to the mechanism allows it to go far beyond the specific stimulus. This faculty is lost at puberty.

(iii) Innate learning includes the recognition of faces and objects as well as the handling of numbers and elements of physics, thus constituting the so-called “*Common Sense*” in the human interaction with the outside world.

(iv) Between the ages of 4 and 6 years, a new mechanism for learning is developed: the acquisition of knowledge, *e.g.*, through education, requires a conscious intellectual elaboration. This form of knowledge is transferable to others. Both of these characteristics differentiate it from innate knowledge, which, being unconscious, is beyond introspective analysis, and is not transferable.

(v) Knowledge imparted through education, especially the learning of science, often contradicts the innate/intuitive one.

(vi) Statements *iv* and *v* do not deny that during the conception of, *e.g.*, a scientific abstraction, an innate mechanism of intelligence operates in conjunction with the conscious process of intellectual elaboration. Rather, and against Foucault/Rancière insistence on an innate unrestricted freedom/creativity, this mechanism delimits the options, ensuring self-consistency by preventing random acts. (Chomsky & Foucault, 1971)(pp.17-26); (Chomsky, 2007)(p.133)

It follows that JJT’s “*equality of intelligence*”, which refers to school-age children and adults alike, necessarily implies the conscious learning process of points *iv* and *v* above, which keeps no connection with the infant’s acquisition of the mother tongue. Being conscious, this learning process is subject to the *novices/veterans* limitations, *i.e.*, at the lower levels requires detailed guidance—or explications—to occur in an efficient and self-consistent manner. Further, since the innate ability of language acquisition is restricted to early childhood, the fact that his students spontaneously spoke French as another mother tongue, and without any help regarding phonetics, strongly suggests an early environmental exposure to it, as already argued.

## Intellectual Emancipation

### *Objective vs. Existential/Empirical/Aesthetic Knowledge*

According to TIS, emancipation occurs on a strictly personal, experiential basis (p.16):

*Everyone has done this experiment a thousand times in his life, and yet it has never occurred to someone to say to someone else: I've learned many things without explanations, I think that you can too. . .*

Rancière/JJT put forward an interpretation of the Socratic Dialogue<sup>17</sup> in order to strengthen their arguments (p.29):

*Through his interrogations, Socrates leads Meno's slave to recognize the mathematical truths that lie within himself. This may be the path to learning, but it is in no way a path to emancipation. On the contrary, Socrates must take the slave by his hand so that the latter can find what is inside himself. The demonstration of his knowledge is just as much the demonstration of his powerlessness: he will never walk by himself, unless it is to illustrate the master's lesson. In this case, Socrates interrogates a slave who is destined to remain one.*

*The Socratic Method is thus a perfected form of stultification.*

This line of arguments is questionable for two reasons.

The first reason is that Socrates does more than just “*take the slave by his hand so that (he) can find what is inside himself*”, as Rancière/JJT imply. The classical interpretation implies, correctly, that through his questions Socrates makes him realise that “*the mathematical truths that lie within himself*”, based on his intuition, are objectively incorrect, but also that it is possible for him to reach the correct answers through his own reason. Nothing in this interaction involves imposing any form of knowledge, nor excludes the possibility of providing/demanding reasons/evidences/independent verification, all options ignored by JJT. Against JJT's negative reading, the Socratic Dialog is an example of learning without explications, through the coordinated intellectual effort of two or more human beings, involved in a

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<sup>17</sup> *The entire Dialogue is available in Plato (380 BCE).*

critical and systematic process of discovery and co-verification of knowledge. (See Nola (1998) and Nola and Irzik (2005)(p.104-9) for detailed discussions of the entire Dialog). The Dialog's also shows the importance of open criticism, similar to that of the scientific literature, and whose explicit intention is, following Popper, to minimize subjectivity through intersubjective testing, a procedure necessarily social. This social aspect is belittled by the postmodern self-reflexivity, something that Rancière/JJT (p.36) make explicit: "*He must begin to reflect on his abilities and on the manner in which he acquired them*", or to "*know (him)self*". The self-referencing, or "*return to oneself*" attitude, is consistent with radical constructivism (see, e.g., Nola (1998)), and leads Rancière/JJT to characterize intellectual consensus as (pp.13,59) "*coincidence stultification*", the Socrates' dialogue as "*the most formidable form of stultification*", and the harmonious resolution of dissent as "*a disturbance that suspends liberty*".<sup>18</sup> (See also the section *Objectivity vs. Subjectivity*.)

The second reason is JJT's intentional denial of any emancipatory power to the acquisition of objective knowledge: "(it) *may be the path to learning, but it is in no way a path to emancipation [...] a slave who is destined to remain one*". Historical records contemporary to JJT contradict his assertion by making evident the subversive value of education in relation to slavery: in many areas in the south of the USA "*slaves were forbidden by law to learn to read or write*", in order "*to keep them stupid, so that they would not rebel*", even though illiteracy limited their productivity. (Edwards *et al.*, 1978, p.72) Further examples are in Genovese (1967 (1961))(pp. 44, 226) y Butchart (2010). An Argentinian case is mentioned by Pineau (2008). For equivalent examples of educational exclusion of Latin American women, see Bonder (1994). A current, and particularly dramatic, case of female educational discrimination can be seen in AlJazeera (2019). Indeed, and as a further example of logical inconsistency, JJT denies his own claims by recognising that "*instruction*" may sometimes question the pre-established social order. In JJT's vision, in the Enlightenment schooling (p.35), "*the harmonious balance of instruction and moral education is that of a double stultification*". The moralist educational slant is meant to "*chase away any extravagant aspirations the schoolchild*

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<sup>18</sup> For subjective justifications, ad-hoc, of JJT's rejection of all forms of consensual agreement, see Nancy (2009) and Fallas Vargas (2016).

would like to extract from his young science”, ensuring his conformity “to the social state that is (his) destiny.” Put simply: normative instruction not necessarily stultifies and subordinates, hence the need for a *second stultifying* shot, of ideological nature.

The same dismissive intentionality is expressed by the Panecastic’s *totality* principle, (pp.26,41) “*everything is in everything*”, which reduces objective knowledge to a mere component within a variety of ‘*knowledges*’, namely, scientific, intuitive, empirical or aesthetic: “*All forms of knowledge are equal*” (Dussel, 2003); “*It is not a question of explaining what scientists, artists or philosophers say or do, but of being, in some way, scientists, artists or philosophers*” (Cerletti, 2003; Chantefort, 2014).

The *totality* principle suffers from a circular contradiction, identified by Badiou (2009)(p.49) in the “*multiple spontaneous knowledges*”, which imply that “*knowledge and nonknowledge are equivalent*”, hence “*if everyone educates everyone else, then no one educates anyone*”.<sup>19</sup>,<sup>20</sup> The ‘*multiple spontaneous knowledges*’ also negate, consistently with Foucault, the temporal continuity of the development of knowledge (see: Chomsky and Foucault (1971),(pp.25-6)). In practical terms: if explications “*stultify*” and social verification, or intellectual agreement, “*suspends liberty*”, each human being, spontaneously and by him/herself, must rediscover/verify that the earth orbits the sun, or conceive, and eventually discard, the miasma<sup>21</sup> as a cause of infections? And if intuitions and beliefs are equivalent to conclusions reached by rational methods, how are we to decide on the correct way of quenching the Damascus steel? This form of high carbon steel is curiously ornamental and extremely hard.(Sullivan, 1981) Developed by Medieval blacksmiths, it was highly appreciated for making swords, among others, the Cid Campeador’s. In the Medieval version, once forged and still red-hot, the sword was

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<sup>19</sup> Nozica (2012) identifies a further circular inconsistency in the fact that the written words are also ‘explanations’, avoided by JTT by assigning value, ad-hoc, only to the learning attitudes, not to what is actually learnt. For similar inconsistencies, see: Skliar (2003); Steimbregger (2019).

<sup>20</sup> Badiou eschews this contradiction imposing a subjective condition, ad-hoc, by defining education as an “anonymous process” by which “we educate ourselves”, based on emotional agreement, or “artistic discipline”, aimed at ‘constructing equality’.

<sup>21</sup> In view of how sanitation, antibiotics, and vaccines changed the life of humanity (see, e.g., Moore (2001)), it is difficult to understand the extension of the panecastic doctrine to medicine to state, Foucault style (see, e.g., Castillo Villapudua (2018)), that doctors periodically ‘need to recreate’ certain diseases to exercise social control through an alleged ‘bio-power’. (Rancière, 2010)(p.50);(Garcés, 2005)

tempered in the body of a muscular slave to transfer his physical strength to the metal. In the modern version, the tempering is carried out in brine at 60°C.

The above does not deny the practical value of the many forms of traditional or empirical knowledge present in today's society, in their original conceptions, or modified by science or technology. The Damascus steel is in itself a fascinating example of human ingenuity, as the wheel, the construction of wooden ships, the use of fungi to cure skin infections, the development of written language, musical instruments, etc. It only intends to put them into perspective: empirical knowledge only justifies itself by induction: if it worked yesterday, it will work tomorrow, but it is not necessarily right, nor unique, nor the best. The objective/scientific, on the other hand, involves constant verification/innovation through coordinated intellectual efforts leading to a cumulative understanding of fundamentals. (Bernal, 1971)(p.42)

Rancière/JJT are hardly the first, nor the only ones, to try and disguise irrationalism as a form of philosophical or educational emancipation. Two classical examples, contemporary to JJT, are relevant.

The first example is in Rice (1999)'s critical discussion of Romantic Modernism. Rice argues that this form of neo-romanticism has become

*a growing cultural authority of a therapeutic ethic. It is this selfsame ethic that informs much postmodern thinking about the self. In this profoundly anti-institutional view, the inner world takes priority over the outer; and the teacher's function is to stimulate the independent growth of his pupil rather than force upon him an extraneous burden of learning,*

a set of concepts that JJT's doctrine mirrors in every detail. The second example is from Eugen Dühring's irrational philosophy, critically discussed by Engels (1987a)(p.78) in his now-classic "*Anti-During*". Dühring's thought is best illustrated by his iconic phrase: "*He who can think only by means of language has never yet learnt what is meant by abstract and pure thought*". This statement is also closely mirrored by JJT (pp.60,84, 136): "*The language of sentiment preceded that of analysis*"; "*There is no language of reason*"; "*There is only a control of reason over the intention to speak*"; "*Truth is felt and not*



*spoken*". Such hierarchic differentiation placing emotions over the formal expressions of thought, reduces language to a mere means of communication. As such, it contradicts the nativist theory, which shows that language is far more than a tool: "*human language is associated with a specific type of mental organization, not simply a higher degree of intelligence.*"<sup>22</sup> (Chomsky, 2006) (p.63)

Two current examples of indoctrinating educational systems, whose commonalities with TIS have been pointed out by Biesta (2017), Ross (2009) and Romero Frías and Magro Mazo (2016), are Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*. A postmodern-utilitarian, "*competency-based*" project, where the teachers assume a *facilitating* role, can be seen in Aguerrondo *et al.* (2016). For further examples and critical discussions, see: Bunge (1995); Cáceres (2017); Kozloff (1998); M. R. Matthews (2012); Nola and Irzik (2005).

The Panecastic doctrine maintains all along a duality in relation to objective knowledge or its transfer during education, *e.g.*, (p.29): "*This may be the path to learning, but [not] to emancipation*"; (p.31): "*we will not make of the ignorant one the fount of an innate science*"; (p.37): "*It is not about opposing [...] the knowledge of the people [...] to the science of schools...*" (p.102): "*learning also takes place at the stultifiers' school*". Further examples are the *double stultification* described above, and in the next section. JJT's duality is consistently reproduced by the supportive literature: Pineau (2008)(p.31) recognizes a "*defensive*" value in objective knowledge; Antelo (2010)(p.6) and Biesta (2017) "*value*" their transmission in education; for Gago and Sztulwark (2012)(p.9): "*this is not a disdain for knowledge*"; Dussel recommends adopting the critical attitude of science to balance the "*postmodern theatre of affections*" (Dussel & Skliar, 2015)(p.26). See also: Izzi (2017) and Southwell (2013). In all cases, however, the subordination of the objective component to the political/personal emancipatory

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<sup>22</sup> Engels' answer to Dühring's assertion is also relevant: "*On this basis animals are the most abstract and purest thinkers, because their thought is never obscured by the officious intrusion of language.*" (Engels, 1987a)(p.78)

subjectivity is made explicit.<sup>23</sup> This “*radical-but-soft*” ambiguity generally characterizes Constructivism in education, and it only means to avoid serious criticism through conditions added *ad-hoc*. For a detailed discussion, see Phillips (1998).

To sum up:

i. The transfer of objective knowledge from the teacher to the student is epistemically democratic. (*Novices/Veterans* section)

ii. Although objective knowledge is specific (*i.e.*, expertise in engineering does not imply expertise in medicine), its epistemology is common. From it arises the normativity of the Enlightenment’s education, in which it ensures the internal consistency of the inquiring attitude.<sup>24</sup> (Nola & Irzik, 2005)(pp.1-14)

iii. It follows from (i) y (ii) that neither objective explications nor intellectual agreement entail “*stultification*”, “*coincidence stultification*”, nor “*suspend liberty*”. These conclusions also invalidate Rancière’s Foucaultian/pseudo-Marxist description of Enlightenment’s educators as unconscious representatives of the ruling classes, and whose function would be the reproduction of the (pp.8,134) “*society of explicated explicators*”, thus guaranteeing “*the effacement of equality under progress, of emancipation under instruction*”, (*e.g.*, del Valle (2017): “*the pedagogical model takes the precise form to justify and reproduce the society it serves*”).

iv. Rancière/JJT need to deny emancipatory value to objective knowledge in order to make room for their *totality* idea and justify the individualistic anarchism<sup>25</sup> of their emancipation, aimed only at breaking away from rationalism and the Enlightenment.

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<sup>23</sup> Jameson (1984) characterizes as ‘pastiche’ and ‘postmodern schizophrenia’ the replacement of the ‘signified’, (the objective emancipation in this case), by ‘the signifier’, (its subjective image). See also Eagleton (1985).

<sup>24</sup> This is reinforced when education is accompanied, as Bernal (1971)(p.411) argues, by studies of the history of science. See also: Kragh (1998); M. R. Matthews (1991); Nola and Irzik (2005)(p. 13)

<sup>25</sup> Rancière’s identification with anarchic, anti-institutional equality is usual. *E.g.*, Ross (2009) describes Rancière’s view of politics in anti-historicist terms, as a sequence of spontaneous and inconsequential events, detached from time or dialectics, aimed only at “reaffirming equality as a principle”, over a purely emotional basis. For similar examples, see: Badiou (2009); Beraldi (2009); Cerletti (2008); Fallas Vargas (2016); Gago and Sztulwark (2012); Hallward (2009); Mey (2013).

### *Personal vs. Institutional Emancipation*

According to JJJ (pp.102):

*Only an individual can be reasonable, and only with his own reason; [...] no school, or institution, will ever emancipate a single person.*

Again, his own experience denies his assertions: if “*only a man can emancipate a man*”, if the institutional education cannot emancipate anyone, why then accept his experience as an example when it involved the members of a formal class, applying the objective knowledge pre-acquired in the normative school, and which had turned them into *veterans* in relation to the particular topic to learn?

JJJ's assertions deceptively hide the fact that his success had no connection with his doctrine: his students' emancipation preceded his class —it had already happened— due to the normative pedagogy of their previous schooling. JJJ's experience proves that intellectual emancipation necessarily involves objective knowledge and tools (see footnote #4), and that it is integral to a social process of education/learning. JJJ/Rancièrè and followers usurp this instructional success in favour of his irrational and anti-Enlightenment stance, providing yet another foothold to Nola's epigraph on the first page of this work.

By denying the intrinsic need of objective referents and methods for a demonstrable, *ergo*, credible emancipation, (*e.g.*, Piña (2016): “*the liberation of thought is more important than knowledge itself*”; Gago and Sztulwark (2012): “*calls upon the activity of the student, [...] as an artist [...] creator of meanings*”), JJJ/Rancièrè and followers adopt the postmodern/Foucaultian relativism, turning themselves into “*free-floating*” intellectuals (something recognised in the literature, see, *e.g.*, Harris (2015); Ross (2009)). By substituting emotional for intellectual consensus, postmodern relativism keeps the door open to arbitrary/irrational proposals. Heidegger's association with the Nazis is perhaps the most sinister philosophical example of emotional arbitrariness, but hardly the only one. In education, postmodern relativism is responsible for the radical forms of constructivism disguised as “*student-centred learning*”, and reformist programs of nature “*multicultural*”, “*feminist*”, “*queer*”, or based on “*critical pedagogies*”, etc. In

these programs, under the pretenses of, e.g., “*incorporating aesthetic knowledge ‘to transcend’ positivist frameworks*” (Serra, 2012), the acquisition of objective knowledge is replaced by the adoption of a belief, shielded by subjective conditions, *ad-hoc*, to prevent its falsifying. For critical discussions, see: Butchart (2012); Cáceres (2017); Kurtulmus and Irzik (2016); Kozloff (1998); M. R. Matthews (2012); Nola and Irzik (2005) (Chs. 2, 13); Nola (1998); Okasha (2002)(p.120-34).

A textbook example of condition *ad-hoc* is in JJT’s opposition (pp.102-9, 130-5) to the creation of schools based on his own universal teaching method. JJT argues that emancipation must be set as a ‘*preliminary*’ rather than as an ‘*end to pursue*’ through any form of ‘*instruction*’. The removal of objective referents from his definition of emancipation allows JJT to adopt a moralistic/emotional high ground, and further belittle the Enlightenment’s normativity by claiming that we should “*prefer*”

*an ignorant emancipated person, one alone, to a hundred million scholars  
taught by Universal Teaching and not emancipated.* (Emphasis added)

It follows that all scholars that ever adhered to objectivist, normative methods, namely, Plato, Bruno, the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Marie Curie,<sup>26</sup> Pasteur, Einstein..., or in the case of the Argentinian public education, Rosario Vera Peñaloza, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento... and, by extension, the primary/secondary/university teachers of the last two centuries, are mere examples of individuals “*not emancipated*”. As (p.108) “*stultified followers of the Old Master*”, they created the current “*society of explicated explicators*”, and continue to do so through the standard normative education. Despite sounding rather extreme, this hypothesis will always allow for exceptions ((p.136): “*The panecastician is interested [...] in every intellectual manifestation*”), disclosing its *radical-but-soft* character to prevent its falsifying. (See also Footnotes #7, #19, #20.)

### *Subjective vs. Objective Emancipation*

Two definitions of intellectual emancipation are contrasted in this analysis:

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<sup>26</sup> Another 90 female scientists are listed by Lewis (2018).

(a) In JJT's vision, personal subjectivity is strictly determinant (pp.35,59,60,70,71):

*It is each man becoming conscious of his nature as an intellectual subject.*

*Each one of us describes our parabola around the truth. No two orbits are alike.  
(The) coincidence of orbits is what we have called stultifying.*

*Truth is not told. It is a whole, and language fragments it; it is necessary, and languages are arbitrary.*

*The artist's emancipatory lesson, [is] opposed on every count to the professor's stultifying lesson. The artist needs equality as the explicator needs inequality.*

(b) The emancipation of the student occurs through the acquisition of objective, socially verifiable, knowledge and methods, leading to the development of a critical and inquiring mind. (Nola & Irzik, 2005) (pp.4-14)

The anti-institutional, anarchic anti-intellectualism of (a) is reflected in the vagueness of the proposals adopting it:

Antelo (2003): *Indocility, which here we call freedom, does not stand hierarchies, it does not yield, as it is the name of what does not yield. Verifying this platitude is what Rancière calls to emancipate.*

Dussel (2003): *The school institutionalizes, orders, subordinates, and therefore dismantles the intellectual emancipation [...] the only way to defend the equalitarian ideal is to stand up to the school-academic setup that creates inequality.*

Frigerio (2003): *[...] it makes it possible not only for anyone to teach even what they do not know, but for anyone to emancipate himself by learning what is not formally teachable.*

Greco (2007a): *We may have to recreate the educational scenes, invent new scenes and love them, believe in them, imagine them and consider them indispensable, for us and for our students.*

Serra and Canciano (2006): *To educate is the act of offering a place so that the one who comes may inhabit it without being reduced to the logic of normalization [...] or [...] to the expected.*

Pineau (2008): *To educate must be [...] an act of giving [...] not [...] to comply with a moral law or just to 'feel good' but [...] as a bet in favour of the others, as an act of trust.*

Baquero (2014): *To generate a political experience as long as it can cause ruptures, rearrangements, positionate alternative students and teachers, it implies [...] betting on the equality of intelligence [...] as a starting point.*

Barros (2010): *The theoretical challenge lies in finding ways in which this egalitarian politics [...] can be kept alive as a source of the will to learn and to change.*

Petrucci (2010): *The relationship of asymmetry —linked to the teacher's knowledge [...] by its own principles, undermines the emancipatory possibilities.*

Colella (2012): *It is a matter of thinking whether equality will be an instance to be conquered in the future through the transfer of knowledge, or whether equality should be postulated as a starting point, in... education as the construction of a collective subject.<sup>27</sup>*

Nozica (2012): *We do not even find a strong argument regarding the policies of truth because the principle of equality of intelligence is only an echo of [...] the human impossibility of reaching any absolute truths through reason.*

Southwell (2013): *We have to be careful and see whether the asymmetric relationships that any educational link implies are founded, not on the transmission of experiences and knowledge, but on the presumed moral superiority of the adult generations.*

Cantarelli and Briscioli (2014): *Emancipation implies giving authority to your own words about the world, verifying in each case the equality of the intelligences.*

Croci (2015): *A teaching that emancipates will be one that [...] considers the differences [...] not to eliminate them but [...] as an enriching possibility for everyone.*

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<sup>27</sup> Colella (2012);(2014a) uses Badiou's *Mathematical Ontology* to question the individualistic character of *JJT's* emancipation, adducing that it resulted from the 'construction of a collective subject': by confronting and solving together a problem, collectively his class transformed its relationship with its own knowledge, enabling each member to individually transform (emancipate) himself. See also: Beraldi (2009); Gago and Sztulwark (2012).

Sardi (2017): [...] *making room for alternative practices and imaginative didactic ways [...] beginning with the intention of democratizing knowledge.*

del Valle (2017): *It invites us to question ourselves about the fundamental and enormous value of knowledges for life, and their 'dissonances' with the educational models and systems.*

Palumbo (2018): *The question [...] is [...] about a certain formalism that could be derived from the privilege of the subjective element towards intellectual emancipation...*

D'Iorio (2018): *A horizon of full realization of equality [...] would only be possible in the imaginary plane, it would be a utopia from which is necessary to take distance from, since it leaves for tomorrow what can be verified today [...] here and now.*

Skliar (2003): *Who knows if the ignorant schoolmaster can be a way of bringing life back to the school. Or to definitely escape from it. I honestly don't know it yet ...*

Tello (2005): *...because we don't want to be another brick on the wall: we resist, we don't know very well how, nor where to [...] we need to think.*

In contrast, according to (b) emancipation has a clear meaning, expressed in simple and concrete terms. It is reproducible, verifiable and historically defensible: a student will be emancipated when she has the necessary tools to deal with problems external to herself. *E. g.*, facing the need, or given the opportunity, she can do what Nicholas Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin or Marie Curie did, or take decisions in life based on defensible arguments. She should be able to conceive and/or verify physical/mathematical models representing abstractions or phenomena, or decide whether the news on television, or information obtained on the Internet or the social networks, are credible (for a case of media manipulation involving primary education, see Cáceres (2018).) In more general terms, she will know, not only *how to do* useful things, like read and write, or add and multiply numbers. She will know *why* and *how* many things happen, in both, the physical and the social universe. More importantly, she will *know how to ask questions*, and *offer/demand proof regarding her own'/others' beliefs*, and therefore she will be able to reach consensual agreements based on intellectual arguments. This all follows from the demonstrable fact that humans can access an

independent, objective reality, and towards which she will have an inquisitive attitude, developed through a critically-enquiring education. (Nola & Irzik, 2005) (pp.4-14)

The fact that JJJ's students' prior normative education was essential to their learning on their own, rules out his class as an example of subjective/personal emancipation, hence leaving (a) with no underpinnings, as already argued. This conclusion, however, does not mean to belittle the subjective component that worries Rancière/JJJ and followers so much. The history of humanity over the past 500 years helps to elucidate the role of each component. The example to mention is Martin Luther's, whom, in 1520, proclaimed the independence of the individual from the Pope's feudal doctrine. (Engels, 1987b)(p.319) In doing that, Luther made explicit the personal/subjective emancipative intention, the "*Wanting*". However, those who really opened the door to the "*Doing*", providing humanity with the intellectual capacity to understand the surrounding reality, often in defiance of political/religious powers, and to eventually modify it through theoretical and practical tools, were, among others, Copernicus (year 1543), Galileo Galilei (year 1633) and Newton (year 1687).<sup>28,29</sup> Again, "*Wanting*" is not enough to achieve intellectual emancipation. To go beyond, and onto "*Doing*", achieving an effective, demonstrable and, above all, self-consistent and reliable emancipation, it is necessary to have an informed and critical mind, on an objectivist basis. This is only made possible by the Enlightenment's normative education, and the success of JJJ's class proved it once again.

Faced with Rancière/JJJ's nihilistic proclamation (p.134):

*Long live the panecastic philosophy! It's a storyteller who never runs out of stories.  
It gives itself over to the pleasure of the imagination without having to settle accounts  
with the truth,*

or with Giordano Bruno's challenge to his Inquisition judges (Rowland, 2008)(p.272):

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<sup>28</sup> Although the origin of the Enlightenment is usually set in the 17th century, its background can be traced back to the Scientific Revolution initiated by Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus* published in 1543.(Nola, 2017)

<sup>29</sup> The historical process of educational emancipation in Argentina is described by Puiggrós (2002) (pp.39-53).



*You may be more afraid to bring that sentence against me than I am to accept it,*

it is not hard to decide which one represents the authentic intellectual emancipation, the one that extracted humanity from the Medieval obscurantism, and which one represents the postmodern version that disguises as Emancipation the escapist solipsism of some educated members of a protected social class.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusions

1. Cognitive science shows that learning without detailed guidance, as in Jacotot's class, is only possible when the students have accumulated sufficient and specific knowledge and experience.
2. The assertion that all human learning involves a process similar to the acquisition of the mother tongue, is denied by the specificity of the nativist theory of language acquisition.
3. The Panecastic Doctrine ignores that as the child matures, learning becomes a conscious process involving intellectual elaboration, which, except in the case of advanced students, requires detailed external help —or explications — to occur efficiently, avoiding mistakes and pointless frustration.
4. Conclusions 1-3 deny the emancipatory role that Rancière/Jacotot ascribe to the Ignorant Schoolmaster.
5. Contrary to the Panecastic premises, *"The explication [is] the principle of enforced stultification"*; *"It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around"*; *"No school [...] will ever emancipate a single person"*, the transmission of objective knowledge from the teachers to their students, being epistemically democratic, and necessarily social, leads to intellectual emancipation, in the school, by enabling the development of a critical and inquiring mind.

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<sup>30</sup> In the words of Eagleton (1985): *"Postmodernism represents the cynical belated revenge wreaked by bourgeois culture upon its revolutionary antagonists"*; Gellner (1992): *"Postmodernism [...] is practiced by at most some academics living fairly sheltered lives"*; Kozloff (1998): *"Constructivism is perhaps best seen as the anarchical utopianism of a socially privileged class (academics) fuelled by fake neo-Romantic sentimentality"*; Romero Reche (2009): *"Postmodernism represents the ideology of a social class enclosed in itself, hence its solipsism"*. See also: Phillips (1998).

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