

Week 1 Reading: Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 1

In the first chapter of the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire highlights the contrast between humanization and dehumanization, emphasizing that as these concepts lay on opposite sides of a spectrum, one (specifically humanization) cannot exist without the other (dehumanization). He posits that liberation cannot be enacted or achieved by the oppressor, regardless of the extent of the “generosity” they may offer to the oppressed. Examples of this “generosity” which came to mind while reading included DEI policies in the workplace and affirmative action policies in schools. These actions, touted as attempts to empower the disempowered, are more about positioning the subjugator as a benevolent force, shielding them from critique, and allowing subjugation to continue. Thus, the responsibility falls on the subjugated to band together to dismantle the system that disempowers them. Unfortunately, this is not the conclusion that subjugated peoples immediately come to: initially it seems that members of oppressed groups attempt to distance themselves from their fellows and align themselves with the oppressor as a means to acquire power for themselves. However, these bids for power are never truly successful, as the system created to disempower them is resistant to attempts to transcend through the ranks, so any social elevation acquired is incredibly precarious.

The painful reality of the matter is that liberation is difficult and uncomfortable, not just for the oppressors who would be forced to relinquish their hoarded power but for the oppressed who have to conceptualize and fight for an entirely new world order, the likes of which they have never experienced. Oppressed people have to reckon with their internalization of oppression just as oppressors must. For oppressed people, the journey to liberation - which has the goal of humanization at its core - involves sitting with the knowledge that their dehumanization has been baked into everything they know to be true in the world. That is to say, they must question everything and take nothing for granted.