The Ignorant Philosopher?
On Jacques Rancière's Political Ontology

Abstract

The development of critical theory after its post-Marxist phase faces the challenge of explaining how society and politics operate without falling into traditional metaphysical prejudices, such as the distinction between base and superstructure, or between science and ideology. Following this legacy, Jacques Rancière's philosophy seeks to understand the nature of politics, what democracy is and what constitutes emancipation. In this paper I will present the core of Rancière's political ontology by relying mainly on four key elements: politics, police, disagreement and democracy, supplementing those basic concepts with a basic notion of his aesthetics and his understanding of philosophy. After that, I will discuss the scope and limits of his approach by raising questions about the grounds that support the structural exclusion of the social, the relation between politics, police and liberal democracy, the role of science, the ontological status of his account and the epistemological considerations that implicitly or explicitly justify his ontology. This will help us to evaluate the legitimacy of Rancière's philosophical commitments and the challenges they face.

§ 1. Politics and police

Politics is for Rancière the human activity that turns on equality as its principle or basic presupposition (Rancière 1999: ix). In the most abstract way, politics concerns the struggle for the redefinition of the distribution of certain shares among certain groups. The parts that one counts to constitute the political community always imply for Rancière a *miscount*. Politics has to do with the struggle for the counting.

> Politics arises from a count of community "parts," which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount (Rancière 1999: 2).

The exclusion of the part of the community which has no part (i.e. historically for Rancière the slaves, the poor, the third state, the proletariat, etc.) is essential to the existence and the reproduction of the political community. That is why the fundamental antagonism and proper political dispute is about the counting of the parts. The normative claims of classical political philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, who hoped for a virtuous elite to rule properly, in order to achieve the best possible political regime, is for Rancière nothing but an ideal dream. In real existing politics, the elite ends up being the rich (οἱ ὀλίγοι). And this division is more fundamental here than it seems at first glance:

> "The struggle between the rich and the poor is not social reality, which politics has to deal with. It is the actual institution of politics itself. There is politics when there is a part of those who have no part, a part or party of the poor. Politics does not happen just because the poor oppose the rich. It is the other way around: politics (that is, the interruption of the simple effects of domination by the rich) causes the poor to exist as an entity" (Rancière 1999: 11)

The struggle to contest the count by those who are miscounted in order to redefine the count is what can be thought as the essential feature of politics. If the fundamental count is not being contested, what we have is an order of domination that represses disorder and revolt. For Rancière, the party of the ruling rich is nothing but antipolitical. Their basic operation is the negation of the existence of this group which is called by Rancière *the part who has no part* (Rancière 1999: 30), or "the people"[1] (δῆμος). The important thing to keep in mind is that for Rancière any type of government is based on that miscount and it has no ultimate foundation to be essential and legitimate. This is due to the fact that there is in politics an intrinsic lack of foundation. For Rancière politics exists because there is no natural or divine principle (ἀρχή) on which society must be grounded. It shows that there is no ultimate ontological ground for any hierarchical social order: "(…) the very ground for the power or ruling is that there is no ground at all" (Rancière 2010: 50). Politics emerges when the so-called "natural" order is interrupted by the *equality* that is always neglected or repressed, but that politics always presupposes.

How are we supposed to understand Rancière's notion of equality as a presupposition?[2] His basic take is that any ruling part that wants to dominate within any order requires at the very least the dominated to understand the order in question and to understand that they must obey (Rancière 1999: 16). For Rancière those two requirements of intelligibility are grounded on a basic equality among human beings. The fact that any ruling party needs them is for Rancière the proof that both of them are in the end are equal.

The political emergence of the part of those who have no part presents a radical challenge to the established count of who effectively counts as a legitimate part into a discussion or in a struggle. When those who are not counted as speaking beings, beings that possess λόγος (the sine qua non condition for being counted as a free equal human being), start to develop an account of their own,

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[1] For Rancière, the people "is a generic name for the set of processes of subjectivation that, enacting the egalitarian trait, dispute the forms of visibility of the common and the identities, forms of belonging, partitions, etc., defined by these forms" (Rancière 2010: 85). Subjectivation is the production of a body and a capacity of enunciation that is not merely identifiable with the given configurative field of experience. It bears the possibility of producing a new field of experience. This process can also be seen as a disidentification from the natural place or role that the police regime established for that part. Subjectivation questions the way a part is counted within a certain configuration. To put it in Davis terms, "To become a political subject is to be heard and seen, and politics is the process of reconfiguring the ways in which subjects are heard and seen" (Davis 2010: 91).

[2] Following May and Tanke, we can think of an equality among us that makes impossible an ultimate justification for a hierarchical order: "If we think of the equal intelligence posited by Joseph Jacotot as indicating that everyone is equally capable of solving Fermat's last theorem or writing brilliant poetry, then it is plainly wrong that we are all equally intelligent. It is certainly true that we are more nearly equally intelligent than our police orders recognize, and the educational experiments performed by Jacotot are evidence of that. However, we are not equally capable of performing high-level abstract tasks, any more than we are equally capable of performing highlevel athletic feats. On the other hand, if we take equal intelligence in a more pedestrian sense to indicate that we are capable of building meaningful lives alongside and in interaction with others, then the concept of equal intelligence becomes both more compelling and more politically relevant. This is the underlying theme of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: not just the equality (or near equality) of intelligence required to perform well in school, but the equality of intelligence required to undercut any justification for the hierarchical divisions of a police order (May in: Deranty 2010: 77); "He does not argue that humans are essentially equal, but that all attempts to justify inequality are incoherent. The reason is simple: in order for authority to be more than arbitrary force, it must inevitably give reasons. This process of supplying reasons undermines the claims advanced on behalf of inequality, for when it attempts to explain the hierarchies it would erect, inequality presupposes equality"(Tanke 2011: 56).

then what we have are two worlds struggling within a single world. That is the sign that tells us that politics has come into being.

> "Politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds" (Rancière 1999: 42).

Politics is for Rancière this disruptive logic that questions the consent and harmony of a certain political community. The consequence is that there is not ultimate order of reason or rational justification to guarantee a legitimate and necessary ruler.

This tension between these logics (equal and disruptive/ unequal and hierarchical) implies for Rancière a certain ahistorical character, even though he does not put it exactly into those terms: "in actual fact, politics has no reason for being in any state of the social and that the contradiction between these two logics is an *invariant* given defining the contingency and precariousness specific to politics" (Rancière 2010: 43, italics added). Politics is logically a priori but temporally always comes after (or in reaction to) the established social and political order, in a dynamic process of distribution and redistribution (Rancière 2010: 207). What should be clear is that the difference between politics and the sociopolitical order is not a difference between two modes of being or political regimes. Instead, the struggle over the count is for Rancière a dispute over a difference in terms of how we are supposed to distribute the sensible, a difference in how we are framing our sensorial experience (Rancière 2010: 92).

Now we are in a better position to understand Rancière's concept of politics presented in the following way:

> "Politics consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals" (Rancière 2004a: 25).

Politics, as we can expect from Rancière's account ends up being a rare and occasional phenomenon (Rancière 1999: 139). This implies that it "is always a possibility: things could always be otherwise", it is not everywhere, but can be everywhere (Davis 2010: 79). It emerges only when the order is put into question because of its contingency, and also when inequality is put into question because of the basic equality of everyone that it is always already presupposed. It is not yet clear what does he means by the "distribution of the sensible". To develop an answer it is necessary to address the other side of the question: how we must conceive the sociopolitical order, or what Rancière calls the "police"?

Any political community that relies on a basic consensus[3] which determines an organization of power and a legitimate distribution of places and roles is called by Rancière not politics, but *police*

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[3] "Consensus means the sharing of a common and nonlitigious experience: its essence is the affirmation of the preconditions that determine political choice as objective and univocal. 'Consensus discourse' in political thought asserts that political action is circumscribed by a series of large-scale economic, financial, demographic, and geostrategic equivalences. Under this rubric, politics—conceived as the action of governments—consists in the adoption of the constraints of these large equivalences along with an attitude of arbitration directed at the residual and

(Rancière 1999: 28). The policing regime refers to something fundamental and all-encompassing: the assumed "spontaneity" of the social relations that constitute and reproduce a certain social order and a certain political community.

> "This includes the institutions and processes governing the organization and representation[4] of communities, the exercise of power, the way social roles are distributed and the way that distribution is legitimated" (Davis 2010: 76)

But for Rancière this configuration must be understood also in an *aesthetic* way, in the sense that it constitutes an order of bodies, a configuration of the perceptible in which one is inscribed. In a broad sense, the police is the configuration that determines the way one should be, stay, do, say, etc. According to Davis "[t]he police order assumes that people have different capacities and are accordingly destined to occupy different positions in a hierarchy" (Davis 2010: 78). Politics is the logic that breaks this contingent configuration by the parts who have no place there, the part of those who have no part.

The partition of the sensible that the police inscribes is the "symbolic constitution of the social" (Rancière 2010: 36). The point that should be emphasized here is that this distribution that constitutes the social is not simply linguistic, but *sensible* (that is why it is also aesthetic). Rancière refers here to what we could call the sensorial and everyday phenomenological experience that we have within a certain social order. Other expressions that try to grasp the policing configuration are "the configuration of sense"[5] and the "distribution of the sensible"[6]. The partition[7] of the sensible of a determinate society makes possible what can be perceived (i.e. what can be seen or heard) and also establishes the different parties that interact within society (i.e. roles, identities, etc.). It determines the modes of being of human beings in a broad ontological sense[8].

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marginal possibilities left behind. On the basis of 'the given,' the right and the left are supposed to make different choices; to do more (the left) or do less (the right) regarding redistribution. In this regard, the left might make more of the 'social' or the 'cultural,' but this is only marginal. The ideal of consensus affirms that what is essential to a life in common depends on objective equilibriums toward which we may all orient ourselves" (Rancière in: Panagia 2000: 123).

[4] Rancière will maintain a constant critique towards confusing representation with democracy. This can be seen in his rejection of any representative role that intellectuals should have for masses and also in his conception of representative democracy as an oligarchy (Lievens 2014).

[5] "A configuration of sense is an effective form of linkage between perceptions, discourses and decisions. This form of linkage creates a specific form of commonsense, defining what can be seen, said and done, and confronting other forms of commonsense, which means other constructions of the possible" (Rancière 2009a: 120).

[6] "This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, and of noise and speech constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2004a: 24-25).

[7] For the multiple meanings of *partage* see Panagia in: Deranty 2010: 95-97.

[8] "[P]olice determines not just the part that any party has in society; it also determines the intelligibility of any party at all. To have no place within the police order means to be unintelligible - not just marginalized within the system, but made invisible by the system. Police orders thereby distribute both roles and the lack of roles; they determine who counts and they decide that some do not count at all" (Chambers in: Deranty 2010: 63).

What is also important is that not all police should be taken as being normatively equal. Rancière states that there are better and worse policing regimes[9]. But even in the most preferable cases, its nature is the same: it is a hierarchical logic that opposes politics[10]. What can be deduced here is that politics is a matter of form. It is not a particular set of issues or any concrete public affair (i.e. economic exploitation). The essential feature of politics is the confrontation directed towards the configuration by seeking its redefinition and showing heterogeneity and contingency. The purpose is to struggle for a new configuration, distribution or inscription. Politics, in a formal sense, always acts upon the police (Rancière 1999: 32). The fundamental confrontation is between a presupposed political equality of speaking beings and an always already[11] current unequal distribution of bodies and partition of the sensible[12].

As we have seen, equality is for Rancière a presupposition of politics in the sense that it assumes an understanding of speaking beings that are miscounted by a policing configuration. In contraposition to the police, "the essence of politics consists in disturbing this arrangement by supplementing it with a part of those without part, identified with the whole of the community" (Rancière 2010: 36). Politics, thus, intervenes in order to redefine this symbolic constitution of the social. It seeks to question and transform our symbolic and sensible relations (i.e. what must be seen, what must be heard, who must speak, etc.). It wants to redefine the common and shared αἴσθησις that we have. Politics is for Rancière the activity that establishes the basic boundaries of the social and challenges an established configuration that distributes the sensible. The kernel of this disruptive logic is characterized by Rancière as disagreement and as the manifestation of democracy.

§ 2. Disagreement and democracy

The inequality of the social that is understood by the counted as inferiors presupposes an equality among speaking beings in the sense that at the very least, the inferior ones *can understand* the commandments[13]. This tension implies the possibility of disagreement (or *dissensus*) in terms of a refusal or confrontation towards the social configuration and its unequal distribution, or in terms of fundamental discrepancies over the basic boundaries:

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[9] This is basically stated and it can be exemplified with different political regimes through history. Nevertheless, Rancière does not present a normative theory or account to evaluate properly different policing regimes in order to distinguish rigorously which one is better and why.

[10] Even in the case of liberal democracy and its debates about what is justice (i.e. Rawls, Nozick, Sen) it is assumed a hierarchical partition of the sensible that Mays addresses as "passive equality" devoid of a proper active character (May 2008: 1-37).

[11] A police order is inevitable (Chambers in: Deranty 2010: 62) and all political regimes are in the end oligarchic (Chambers in: Deranty 2010: 67).

[12] "[I]n each hierarchy there is always the distinction between those who have a part and those who do not, between those who are fit to make decisions and to create lives and those whose lives are to be created for them" (May in: Deranty 2010: 71).

[13] "This, then, is Rancière's response to Aristotle's partitioning of the logos: there is no meaningful distinction between perceiving and possessing reason. Understanding an account of inequality requires one to continually translate it, that is, rewrite it in one's own words. Thus, in a situation where domination relies upon denying someone's full possession of the logos, the simple act of understanding a command can become an occasion for staging a counterdemonstration of equality" (Tanke 2011: 57).

> "A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions, or values; it is a division put in the 'common sense': a dispute about what is given, about the frame within which we see some- thing as given" (Rancière 2004b: 304).

The structure of disagreement is over the capacities of the parts and the objects they try to present to dispute in politics. This can be expressed by acknowledging that one can dispute not only a particular interest, but most importantly the object of the dispute, the very existence of the dispute and the partners of the dispute. Dissensus is not the simple everyday confrontation or conflict of interest between different parts. For Rancière, it is "the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself" (Rancière 2010: 38).

Unlike transcendental phenomenology, which tries to deploy an account over our inevitably transcendental (i.e. common) giveness that makes possible the given, Rancière's conception of politics and disagreement denotes the struggle that determines the basic agreement over different worlds within one world (the policing regime). This implies a constant tension between exclusion and inclusion for any human social order. Politics, then, is not just an ontic region composed of entities and processes that political science studies[14]. The political has here an ontological grounding feature that institutes and constitutes the social. What results from this configuration is maintained by an ontic administration of the given (the police), a policing regime that in the end always belongs to the realm of political *consensus*[15].

> "Politics does not separate a specific sphere of political life from the other spheres. It separates the whole of the community from itself. It opposes two counts of counting it. You can count the community as the sum of its parts—of its groups and of the qualifications that each of them bears. I call this way of counting police. You can count a supplement to the sum, a part of those who have no part, which separates the community from its parts, places, functions, and qualifications. This is politics, which is not a sphere but a process (Rancière 2004b: 305).

The people in this context is reformulated here to denote the unqualified collectivity (the part of those who have no part) who disagree with the way things are given and democracy "is not the power of the poor. It is the power of those who have no qualification for exercising power" (Rancière 2004b: 304). They are the part who have no part, the count of the uncounted. This is for him the true meaning of δῆμος. The δῆμος is not a sociological fixed category. For Rancière it is a formal position that one incarnates if one speaks "when he is not to speak" (Rancière 2010: 32). This is the meaning of partaking in what one has no part whatsoever[16]. The δῆμος, thus, "inscribes the count of the uncounted" (Rancière 2010: 33). Any collectivity which occupies the δῆμος seeks to redefine the rights of the ontic order because that order excludes their being in an essential way. It is in this sense that the presupposed equality promoted by the political logic of disruptive disagreement grasps for Rancière the true meaning of democracy.

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[14] Following this ontological distinction, political science and political sociology are sciences of the police because they study the ontic, even when they address the revolutionary situations or struggles. Their vocabulary is the vocabulary of the police. The question is if that assumption forbids empirical social science to be critical or to address politics in a crucial way.

[15] One way to see what disagreement challenges is what demand counts and what counts as a legitimate demand. For example, why saving a bank counts ("necessary") and not increasing the taxes for the upper classes ("impossible")?

[16] It is also a dramatic performance that constructs a stage "of and by, but never 'for', the people" (Hallward 2006: 119).

Since equality is a presupposition and not a goal of politics, as we have seen above, we can infer that for Rancière democracy is the power of the people, "the power of those who have no special entitlement to exercise power, is the very basis of what makes politics thinkable. If power is allotted to the wisest or the strongest or the richest, then it is no longer politics we are talking about" (Rancière in: Agamben et al. 2011: 79). Democracy, thus, emphasizes the lack of ground of any government, the lack of any part meant to rule[17] (Rancière 2009b: 46-47):

> "Democracy first of all means this: anarchic 'government', one based on nothing other than the absence of every title to govern" (Rancière 2009b: 41).

Democracy should not be understood as a political regime, or as a set of institutions. Within Rancière's framework, democracy is instead the disruptive moment that challenges the current distribution of the police, becoming the "institution of politics itself" (Rancière 1999: 101; Rancière 2010: 32). The appearance of the people as a collective does not denote here a sociological or empirical description. The people is an articulation of the parties that are not counted (or miscounted) by the policing regime. It "displaces any social identification" (Rancière 1999: 100). The main active opposition of that emerging collective is not of a certain particular interest, but of the way of a fundamental counting of the parties or of the affairs that are in dispute[18]. They contest the current inscription of equality and seek to make effective new inscriptions of equality. Politics for Rancière is inevitably democratic because it develops a confrontation between the political logic of equality and the policing logic of hierarchical distribution[19].

The situation of a society with a regime and institutions without a δῆμος in Rancière's sense is typified as "postdemocracy" or as "consensus democracy" (Rancière 1999: 102). It implies the disappearance of politics in Rancière's sense because it identifies the parties as given and eliminates the possibility of a miscount. All disputes are reduced to problems or conflicts of interest that can be solved with proper instrumental means[20]. Economic and judicial elements end up gaining primacy to diagnose and address public issues[21].

After seeing the core elements of Rancière's political ontology and appreciating to what extent they dissolve traditional notions of politics and democracy, what remains is to consider how this conception also relies on a specific critique of traditional philosophy.

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[17] But also, it questions the attempt to ground political action in fixed social identities (Deranty 2007: 239).

[18] "Democratic politics is not something that happens to people. It is something they do. They do it when they act together, alongside those in solidarity with them, under the presupposition of their equality within a police order that does not recognize that equality. (…) In a period in which we are encouraged to become passive, (…) for politics to become our politics, we cannot be its audience; we must instead be its actors" (May in: Deranty 2010: 79).

[19] "(…) "Rancière reminds us that no social arrangement is likely to be good enough, that every social arrangement is in principle open to disruption by egalitarian politics" (Davis 2010: 100).

[20] One example to illustrate this imperative happened in Peru a couple of years ago. There was going to be a National March for the Water (Marcha Nacional por el Agua), questioning extractive industries and informal business that were careless of the environment. Former Peruvian Prime Minister Oscar Valdés declared that he would rather prefer a "technical march" instead of a political one in which the mobilizing leaders could show what problems they were seeing with the water.

[21] Another clear example of this discourse lies in Hernando de Soto's only explanation of political issues: lack of property rights.

§ 3. Philosophy

Philosophy's task here is not to rescue or lead politics, as in some traditional versions of Marxism. The inevitable problem that political philosophy has with politics lies in the former's attempt to rationalize it by suppressing the disagreement (the constitutive element of the latter). The paradox or scandal of politics is for Rancière the fact that it lacks a foundation (Rancière 1999: 61). The program of political philosophy since Socrates and Plato, understood as the politics of the philosopher, seeks to ground politics in a principle or truth. This essence of politics that the philosopher pursuits is for Rancière the opposite: the elimination of politics and the suppression of the distinction between politics and the police (Chambers in: Deranty 2010: 57-59). Instead, we are left with their merging or identification from which the prime example is Plato's Καλλίπολις. Political philosophy in this sense has three major figures: archipolitics, parapolitics and metapolitics[22] (Rancière1999: 65).

After the critique of traditional political philosophy it is possible to realize that philosophy and intellectual activity, for Rancière, has no inherent prerogative to enlighten the masses. They can pursuit their ends without a prophet or a wise elite. The example of this immanent generation of political action is May 1968. Philosophy for Rancière in the end is a contingent activity that does not have an ultimate justification (Rancière 2010: 218). The traditional notion of philosophy as a systematic and metaphysical enterprise is here replaced with a critical activity that deconstructs or questions what is established. This movement reconfigures the common ways in which we think and act (Rancière 2010: 218).

> "What emerges is a form of philosophy that continually displaces itself in order to make room for other practices working to create the distribution of the sensible. It is a form of thinking content to take part in a conversation with other efforts to clarify and critique our world" (Tanke 2011: 8).

Because of this critique of philosophy, Rancière does not believe that he produces "theory" in the usual sense. He conceives his work as a polemical and politically charged "intervention in specific contexts" (Rancière 2009a: 114). His work is for him something that has to do with the question of

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[22] Archipolitics is the project of a community grounded in an αρχη. This requires a dispositive like Plato's narrative of the metals in order to secure a natural distribution within the social configuration of the πολιτεία. The objective is to ground hierarchy without illegitimate relations of domination. It is the identification of φύσις and νόμος. Parapolitics is best exemplified by Aristotle. For Rancière, it also identifies the police and politics, but from the point of view of the disruptive nature of politics. There is a natural equality that is expressed in the proper alternation between the rulers and the ruled because they are in the end equal. The actors of political conflict are here parts of the policing regime that requires a center that properly balance the different parts. Political struggle is dissolved here into a partisan or factious competition for governmental control, where the ideal balance should come from a mixed regime oligarchic and democratic with a middle class as its most important base of support. But Rancière also thinks that modern political philosophy since Hobbes is also parapolitics because it assumes equality and freedom at the beginning of their speculations about the social order. Individuals and rights are the principle that seek to constitute a sovereign entity by a certain kind of consent and alienation. Finally, metapolitics states that what politics pursuit in terms of justice and equality comes necessarily with a sort of surplus of injustice and inequality (Rancière 1999: 81). It is a discourse on the falseness of politics. Marx's "On the Jewish Question" is the prime example here. Political citizenship masks social inequality. Politics is here "the lie about a reality that is called society" (Rancière 1999: 83). In Marx, "ideology" is the concept that emerges to denote the illusion that conceals reality. Real emancipation transcends and dissolves ideological mystification and political identities or relations. For Rancière, here political philosophy culminates its task of eliminating politics.

where one is situated and the frame that makes visible certain things. He is interested "in ideas at work" (Rancière 2009a: 116). But most importantly, he states that he lacks an ontological account and that he cannot deduce politics from ontology. Instead, he proposes to investigate politics in the context of "its birth or its disappearance" (Rancière 2009a: 117). This statement, whether right or wrong, goes against the interpretations that attribute to him a political ontology.

Rancière is committed to the dissolution of the distinction between theory and practice. There is no theory that explains something that practice should learn and follow. There are configurations where perceptions, orientations, movements and interpretations are tied (Rancière 2009a: 120). His philosophy is understood as "a moving map of a moving landscape" (Rancière 2009a: 120)[23]. What we have is a critical engagement with philosophy that is not just destructive, but productive. Rancière's philosophy not only abandons traditional political philosophy but also questions traditional boundaries. It ends up being not interdisciplinary, but "indisciplinary" because it defies the divisions themselves (Tanke 2011: 9).

§ 4. A Critique of Rancière's Political Ontology

We should start our critical assessment of Rancière's philosophy by asking a naïve question: Is unsuccessful politics something possible for him? If politics has to do with the struggle for a reconfiguration of the configuration, could that struggle still be seen as political even if it fails? At first, it should be obvious that the political is the logic that seeks that change, whether it achieves it or not, but Rancière emphasizes the success here:

> "A strike is not political when it calls for reforms rather than a better deal or when it attacks the relationships of authority rather than the inadequacy of wages. It is political when it *reconfigures* the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community" (Rancière 1999: 32, italics added)

For example, it is possible to think Occupy movements as something political within Rancière's conception of politics. Nevertheless, if we state that those movements were ineffective in reconfiguring the policing regime, the question is if that would undermine their nomination as something properly political. This let us to ask another question in the opposite path: can the police reconfigure immanently its own configuration?

We have seen that politics acts on the policing regime, seeking to transform the configuration of the field of experience. That is why it is defined as a disruptive, and we could add, *radical* logic. The question here is if reformist measures could achieve a gradual reconfiguration without radical struggle (Davis 2010: 93). If the policing regime can be transformed immanently, then we could have new configurations without politics. Especially if we seek success and not just public manifestations of discontent.

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[23] The problem with this image is that Rancière lacks a normative account with criteria to distinguish what would count as better, or worse, "mapping".

Chambers addresses this tension between that politics and police in the following way:

> "Impurity is, by definition, never simple. And the impurity of politics produces a paradox for Rancière's thought. On the one hand, politics must not be pure. On the other, politics as that which disrupts the police order must somehow remain 'other' to that order; this is why the 'blending' is never a merging. For the disruptive force of politics to be preserved, it must somehow remain external to the police order that it would disrupt. Yet politics as pure 'externality' would preclude the necessary 'meeting of the heterogeneous' that enacts politics. Hence, politics must be other to police, but not purely other. The key to responding to this paradox is to refuse to overcome it. Instead, Rancière's theory of politics must be understood as thinking the paradox, as capturing its flavour and mobilizing its force, rather than attempting to erase or resolve it (Chambers 2011: 310)[24].

Following our previous example, we could say that Occupy Movements are political in Rancière's sense because they seek to question the configuration, but they ended up being ineffective in terms of challenging the configuration. Maybe their demands and perspectives where radical, but not their impact in the policing regime. But, in the Spanish aftermath of those movements, Podemos as a political party that seeks power in order to pursue economic and political reforms is challenging the traditional Spanish party system. The question here is if this political party should be seen as a political act over the police or as a former political act that is playing a part of the configuration. Maybe following Chambers interpretation (that there is no pure politics and no place outside the police) it could be possible to make sense out of cases like this one.

Other complementary question emerges if we think that democracy, understood as the political regime, could develop important progress regarding inclusion in the following decades. If that happens to be the case, the miscounted could become a minority. In this scenario, the δῆμος, in Rancière's terms, could end up being a small group[25]. The weird result here is that liberalism could probably be a better set of political institutions and arrangements to deal with their reconfiguring demands of the sensible, instead of a mobilization without enough support. Disagreement would be in this case a less likely successful strategy than a policing consensus-seeking procedure.

If we follow the previous trend, an extreme question that arises concerns why it is not possible to include everybody? What is the reason to affirm the ontological impossibility to eradicate the place of the unqualified? Is it because human's political configuration of the given is contingent and fallible? Rancière never develops a philosophical explanation of why there is always miscount, once we renounce to a dialectics of history[26]. It is simply assumed. The reason for an inevitable

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[24] Deranty inserts a third term: "the political" to mediate police and politics, but Chambers have showed that this attempt is really problematic (Chambers 2011).

[25] This is compatible with Rancière's diagnosis because politics is not class-based or something that only belongs to the masses.

[26] The consequence for this is the rejection of the modern narrative of an enlightened linear process, or of a dialectical resolution of social contradictions that promotes emancipation. These results are summarized by Chambers and Deranty: "The encounter between *la politique* and la police is never definitive, never final, and never produces a new 'stage' of history. It is always a renegotiation of the very police order in which we live. And in the end, democratic politics can do nothing else than this: renegotiate the police order" (Chambers 2011: 318); it is not about "(…) the hope that politics will save us, but that democratic politics will change what is, will alter what is given" (Chambers 2011: 318); "The history of democratic rights is not that of a cumulative acquisition toward the telos of communicative transparency, but a history of singular solutions to the dialectic of equality and inequality, a series of locally situated

and structural miscount within the social is missing and we cannot take it for granted, at least not in a philosophical discussion.

An analogous questioning can be posted on the presupposition of equality. Is it illegitimate to demand a rational justification for the equality presupposition? Rancière is against Habermasian transcendental pragmatics of communicative action, but it is not clear why the presupposition of equality that Rancière endorses is not playing the role of a transcendental *a priori* condition of politics. One could say that this is different because it is a negative presupposition, without a reason or a content that one could develop into a philosophical account, such as Habermas'. Otherwise, one will be presupposing what is being put into question (Rancière 2010: 29). Also, it could be said that disagreement for Rancière is claimed to be something that is prior to Habermas' communicative rationality because he thinks that Habermas' account takes for granted the constitution of parties, the stage of the discussion and the object of the discussion, what counts as an argument or even what counts as a subject (Rancière 2010: 38-39). The other problem is that communicative action seeks consensus or agreement based on the better reasons and Rancière believes that consensus as an end is only the ideal of repressing politics in the name of the police. This is due to the fact that politics is a radical disruptive logic that puts into question the basic presuppositions of any normative political theory that has consensus as the political objective to be pursued[27] (Rancière 2010: 42-43).

But to do this is simply to establish without justification a presupposition as a self-evident given fact. It is also problematic to state that, and at the same time to say that political disagreement has a certain rationality. In the end we have the strange case of a presupposition that is rational but exempted from the obligation to give a rational justification for itself[28]. Even the example of the understanding of the superior's order by the inferior as a proof of a certain basic equality among them can be used to defend the Habermasian transcendental conditions of communicative rationality.

Another question about the relation between politics and police has to do with the consequence of denying that democracy is a political regime, that is, if politics could originate an anti-democratic policing regime. For Rancière the answer is always affirmative because every policing regime is oligarchic. But if we lack normative criteria to evaluate better or worse policing regimes, and if only the egalitarian disruptive logic of disagreement is what can be genuinely called democratic, the question is if this does not open the door to the institution of repressive governments that can be worse than liberal democracies, even though they were instituted by a democratic and radical struggle? It is not uncommon in history that plebiscitary leadership, political or even military organizations have canalized public discontent towards the political establishment and their

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inscriptions of equality into the realm of inequality" (Deranty 2003: 153). Politics is not going to save us or take us somewhere. We are devoid of any messianic or eschatological account. For how this non-dialectical logic could be inserted in the philosophical tradition of debates concerning recognition, but without the limits of Hegelian dialectics see Deranty 2003.

[27] I am not sure if this is also a valid argument because of empirical evidence. Is it possible to say that European Welfare States after World War II were based on a basic consensus between workers and capitalists? If that is the case, could we really say that this was a "return to the normal state of things"? (Rancière 2010: 43).

[28] A possible weaker way to understand the presupposition could be in a sort of ethical way: Act as if you were already equal (May in: Deranty 2010: 72).

institutions in order to institute authoritarian and repressive regimes. Could we make the case that their origins where democratic in Rancière's sense or it is necessary to reject that by saying that only policing regimes that are closer to our normative commitments are based on a democratic origin?

One answer is to say that the origins may be political and that the political itself is unpredictable in its causes and in its effects[29]. But is this sort of *ex machina* description of the political is preferable than a reasonable explanation? To emphasize the idea that politics is simply unpredictable and it is more like "chance" or without ultimate reason is to renounce to the development of an account that seeks to explain politics. This one of the reasons why Rancière is not sympathetic to social sciences.

> "His fundamental assumption, in all the debates in which he has taken part, is that people are always more free than the social scientists and external observers give them credit for. *People should always be assumed to be capable of thinking and acting*. We should avoid descriptions of the social realm and politics, analyses of domination and oppression, that lead to the conclusion that those suffering from them are fated to be crushed by them and are forced to accept them. Put negatively: the structures of inequality can always be denounced and struggled against. In positive terms: the unexpected can always occur. The task of theory for Rancière is to transform categories of thought and language so that we can be receptive to, and participate in, the emergence of new configurations, whether in social and political relations, in educational organizations or in artistic practices" (Deranty 2010: 184, italics added).

The problem with this diagnosis is that one could be committed to rational explanations of political phenomena without being deterministic or fatalistic. If we have complex and global issues today, it is imperative for critical theory to complement his ontological reflections with empirical accounts. In the case of Political Science, for example, good research in Comparative Politics can really help us to understand better certain political phenomena.

We cannot be indifferent to those scientific efforts with a simple dismissal of accusing social science of being in compliance with the policing regime. Does science is inevitably a policing enterprise? Because the whole point of relating the aesthetic to the political is by showing that both

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[29] May tries to make the case on how we should understand this feature of politics: "The contingency of democratic politics, and the rarity of mass democratic movements, should not lead us to fatalism or despair. The lesson of the contingency of political movements is not that we cannot incite or affect them, or that we must await their appearance. It is precisely that we do not know when and how they appear. That is what contingency means" (May 2010: 156); "The lesson for progressive politics is this: rather than becoming fatalistic, we must instead be vigilant. We must seek to understand the circumstances we are in, look for political openings, educate one another, support the democratic brush fires that arise here and there. Will any of this result in a democratic movement, mass or otherwise? Or instead will these be exercises in failure, efforts that lead nowhere? *We don't know*. We do not know what will happen if we insert ourselves into the political arena, stand among or alongside the part that has no part. We do not know whether our actions will mobilize an obligation to hear. But we do know what will happen if we do not act. We know this because it is our world; it is the police order that governs us" (May 2010: 157, italics added); "Democratic politics is not dead, simply because it is never dead. It is neither dead nor alive. Rather, it comes to life, here and there, when the circumstances are right and people are decided. The project then, for those for whom democracy matters, is not to pronounce upon its fate nor to seek its Archimedean point. It is instead what it has always been: to be ready to engage it, to create it, alongside others with whom one stands and with whom one may share nothing else but equality" (May 2010: 158).

activities seek to redefine the configuration that distributes the sensible. But Rancière never talks directly about science. And this question is not only about if politics requires science[30]. He rejects the primacy of a theory that says to the people what to do, but it is possible to say that science has also historically played a major role in redefining how we experience the world. Just thinking about cosmological and biological explanations, as well as explanations provided by the social sciences, would put us in a position in which it should be mandatory to say something about why this type of activity is not included among the emancipatory ones. Otherwise we will implicitly assume that science will be always in compliance with the policing regime. But the history of science and its conflict with governments and religion challenge dramatically that presupposition.

Another problematic consequence of this approach to science lies in the fact that Rancière's disruptive logic of politics tend to neglect important material elements because it is too formal. Regarding the formal definition of the δῆμος as the agent of politics, it seems that its formality misses the material and structural conditions for its production and reproduction[31]. What I mean here is that thinking in terms of a "spontaneous" (almost *ex machina*) emergence of political action by the miscounted who challenge the policing inscription fails to account and to acknowledge that human beings need different resources to improve their chances of political mobilization and political success. Even if we assume that Rancière is right about the structural miscount of any social order, it is not by far a sufficient condition for politics. For that it is necessary to rely on certain resources and material conditions[32]. The consequence is that if a policing regime is too unequal or repressive in the distribution of the sensible, politics will unlikely happen.

Is not that the oppressed is always a militant dissident that seeks emancipation. Sometimes their condition is empirically more similar to Agamben's picture of the bare life. In other cases it is even worse: the oppressed thinks that his oppression is legitimate or inevitable. This ideological bias is also empirically present in the past and today and goes, to some extent, against Rancière's critique of the Marxist distinction between science and ideology. Sometimes the oppressed are wrong, or even (according to Žižek's psychoanalytical diagnosis) want to be mastered (Davis 2010: 94). And sometimes the oppressed are deprived from minimum material conditions to fight for their own freedom, which does not mean that they lack agency at all. In the end, the problem that lies at the basis is that not every unqualified is equally subversive and that not every policing regime is

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[30] Hallward adresses this issue: "Does political action no longer need to be informed by a detailed understanding of how the contemporary world works, how exploitation operates, how transnational corporations go about their business? 'We already know all this', Rancière tends to say: everyone has always understood the way they are exploited or oppressed. However, in Rancière's account there is no clear way of knowing what people may know, since what matters is less knowledge than the posture of mastery presumed in any claim to knowledge" (Hallward 2006: 127).

[31] We can remember this voluntaristic notion of politics against contingent policing regime here: "The dominated do not remain in subordination because they misunderstand the existing state of affairs but because *they lack confidence in their capacity to transform it*. Now, the feeling of such a capacity presupposes that the dominated are already committed to a political process in a bid to change the configuration of sensory givens and to construct forms of a new world to come, from within the existent world" (Rancière 2004a: 45, italics added). As we have seen, this is an unorthodox premise (Tanke 2011: 10).

[32] This question tries to go beyond May's account: "The claims he does endorse are that first, a democratic politics is a politics of equality; and second, it is wrong to deny the equality of others. The claim he does not endorse is the one that seems to bridge those two: that the demos is obliged to act in the name of its own equality" (May 2008: 119). Our question is about the case of a demos that cannot materially act in the name of its own equality.

equally repressive, even though all regimes inevitably will miscount human beings. Against Rancière, we should remember (especially in politics) that "the devil lies in the details".

My final critical comment asks if Rancière's critical theory remains faithful to the critical legacy. In his philosophy important elements are not theoretically explicit. There is no clear account on language, epistemology and ontology. It is not explicit how language is understood, the way it relates to the world or what is meaning. At the same time there is no explicit conception of being, as well as an account on the proper way to know being. This generates the problematic and uncritical situation of a political ontology that does not ground its basic presuppositions. In brief, the ontological status of Rancière's account, its epistemological guaranties, and the way in which we should understand the way his philosophical discourse as language operates are not developed enough. There lies the most crucial issue. Rancière's fundamental political ontology is a formal articulation of empty categories that seek to explain the institution of the socio-political order. But, what is the ontological status of this fundamental political ontology? Is it transcendental, not subjective, but present into the possible social relations between human beings? Or is it grounded in language or in being itself? Or is something different? But also, how do we access this basic ontological condition of the social? Is it a result of a mere empirical induction of political historical events, as in a basic positivist theory? If that is the way, we do not have a clear criteria to distinguish between this account and the police's diagnosis of the social. Other possibility could be a rational deduction from certain axioms. But how do get access to those first principles? By a transcendental deduction of human being's essence or existence, meaning a return to phenomenology? Or from a sort of "intellectual intuition" or "introspection"? These questions are of major importance if we want to rigorously ground Rancière's philosophical project. Otherwise we will be just accepting a more sophisticated version of a pre-critical dogmatic metaphysics, no matter how critical or radical it calls itself.

In the end we can, thus, answer the question of the essay's title in two ways. We can say that Rancière is a philosopher who rejects the idea that a philosopher knows something that the masses need for their emancipation, and in that way he could be seen as philosophical hero of ignorance. But also, we can say that Rancière's account raises certain questions that are really problematic for politics and for philosophy, and in that case his account, even though is presented as being critical and anti-dogmatic, ends up being metaphysically dogmatic. And that would make him a victim of ignorance.

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