Ethics as a Method and the Meanings of Ideal (II): A Criticism of Meads' Moral Philosophy[*1]

Ética como Método e os Significados do Ideal (II): Uma Crítica da Filosofia Moral de Mead

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Abstract: This work is the second part of my research on Mead's philosophy. While the heart of the first article (VIALE, 2008a) was a descriptive reconstruction of Mead's theses on moral philosophy, my current objective is to point out and criticize some shortcomings I have found in it. The core of my criticism is that a tension within Mead's moral philosophy exists and I try to show how this tension works. Particularly, I think there is a necessary but unrecognized tension between the Meadean conceptions of ethics as a method and of an ideal world. The lack of acknowledgment of this tension, caused mainly by Mead's shortcomings regarding his conception of ideal, entails a contradiction within Mead's practical philosophy: sometimes, Mead's methodological dictum seems to require a democratic background to work; sometimes, Mead conceives his methodological dictum working in any kind of normative background. To carry out this task I will present two lines of argument: that Mead's conceptions of ethics as a method and ideal world imply different kinds of theoretical commitments; on the other hand, that Mead's conception of ideal world cannot coherently arise from his conception of method as he argues. In order to develop my hypothesis, I have divided this article into four parts: first of all I present the theoretical background of the relationships between ethics as a method and the Meadean ideal world; in the second part I attempt to show why a necessary tension between ethics as a method and the ideal world exists; in the third part I argue why Mead's ideal world cannot coherently spring from his conception of method; finally, I present my conclusions.

Key words: George H. Mead. Moral philosophy. Ideal world. Normative aspect of ethics. Tension between ethics as a method and ideal.

Resumo: *Este trabalho é a segunda parte da minha pesquisa sobre a filosofia de Mead. Enquanto a essência do primeiro artigo (VIALE, 2008a) foi uma*

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reconstrução descritiva das teses de Mead sobre filosofia moral, meu objetivo atual é apontar e criticar algumas falhas que encontrei nela. O cerne da minha crítica é a existência de uma tensão dentro da filosofia moral de Mead, que eu tento demonstrar como se opera. Particularmente, penso que há uma tensão necessária, porém despercebida, entre as concepções Meadianas de ética como um método e de um mundo ideal. A ausência de reconhecimento dessa tensão, causada principalmente pelas falhas de Mead em relação à sua concepção de ideal, implica uma contradição dentro da filosofia prática de Mead: às vezes, a máxima metodológica de Mead parece necessitar de um contexto democrático para ser válida; ocasionalmente, Mead concebe sua máxima metodológica dentro de qualquer tipo de contexto normativo. A fim de executar esta tarefa, apresentarei duas linhas de argumentação: que a concepção de Mead de ética e mundo ideal implica tipos diferentes de compromissos teóricos; de outro lado, que a concepção de Mead de mundo ideal não pode, coerentemente, derivar de sua concepção de método, como ele argumenta. A fim de desenvolver minha hipótese, dividi este artigo em quatro partes: em primeiro lugar, apresento o contexto teórico das relações entre ética como método e o mundo ideal meadiano; na segunda parte, tento demonstrar por que existe uma tensão necessária entre ética como método e o mundo ideal: na terceira parte, argumento por que o mundo ideal de Mead não pode coerentemente derivar de sua concepção de método; finalmente, apresento minhas conclusões.

Palavras-chave: *George H. Mead. Filosofia moral. Mundo ideal. Aspecto normativo da ética. Tensão entre ética como um método e ideal.*

1. The Link Between Ethics as a Method and the Ideal World

In the previous article ("Ethics as a Method and the Meanings of Ideal I. Toward a Conceptual Reconstruction of Mead's Moral Philosophy") I have presented Mead's central tenets on ethics from a descriptive point of view. Although one could examine each of these theses individually, there are obvious and relevant connections among them and, consequently, Mead's ethics appears as a promising comprehensive formulation from philosophical and sociological points of view. Four issues are particularly important within Mead's framework: that his pragmatist theory of the moral action explicitly relates to problematic moral situations; his commitment with moral universalism; the key role of his conception of method; and the existence of an ideal aspect, indistinctly called by Mead "ideal world" and "democratic ideal". The analysis of the third and the fourth issues allows recognizing a sharp difference in their scope. While Mead constantly and systematically refers to the importance of the method, the ideal aspect has a rather unclear function within his philosophy, since he sometimes sustains that only concrete elements are decisive and that ideal dimensions are either superfluous or negative from the point of view of the *moral sciences*, and sometimes he maintains that ideal factors are important but only if they arise from the use of the appropriate method.

I think the origin of this ambivalence lies in the problematic status that the term *ideal* has within Mead's philosophy. Mead relates the term ideal with a perfect reality beyond individuals, i.e., a *transcendent* reality whose features are previous and independent of individuals. He has always vehemently opposed this conception, whose greatest exponent in the American tradition was -in Mead's view- Josiah

Royce.[1] In this interpretation the term *ideal* is closely related to Absolute Idealism: "The grandiose undertaking of Absolute Idealism to bring the whole of reality within experienced failed. It failed because it left the perspective of the finite ego hopelessly infected with subjectivity and consequently unreal" (1964, 306). Also Mead's label "*external* ideal" -that he uses in (1908) "The Philosophical Basis of Ethics"- has the same meaning as well as statements that can be found in his mature work (1930) "The Philosophies of James, Royce and Dewey in Their American Setting":

> In the *Outline of Ethics* we find the will, the idea, and the consequences all placed inside of the act, and the act itself placed only within the larger activity of the individual in society. All reference of knowledge to a *pre-existent ideal reality* has disappeared. Knowledge refers to consequences imagined or experienced. (1964, p. 388).

In this periphrasis, Mead not only describes features of Dewey's philosophy (with the reference to Dewey's *Outline of Ethics*) but highlights relevant issues from his own perspective: a conception of *ideal* or *ideal reality* that does not spring from concrete situations is epistemologically and ontologically ungrounded. Therefore, whether a conception of ideal is required, it must refer to imagined or experienced conse-quences arising from particular or concrete situations. Starting from these statements, the nucleus of Mead's philosophical ambivalence can be acknowledged: when he interprets the meaning of pragmatism,[2] Mead emphasizes the naturalistic character of his philosophy leaving aside ideal dimensions;[3] and developing his own pragmatist work, he uses ideal dimensions but always specifying that they spring from the use of the method. In my view, these are the two axes of Mead's *ambivalent naturalism*, whose ambivalence turns around the rejection of ideal aspects –when in his own interpretations he emphasizes his naturalism- and the necessity of ideal aspects in order to make his pragmatist moral philosophy coherent.[4] Consequently, when Mead refers to ideals in a positive way, he tries to relate them with his naturalist philosophy. Perhaps the best example is the following paragraph: "*It sets up an ideal world, not of substantive things but of proper method. Its claim is that all the conditions of conduct and all the values which are involved in the conflict must be taken into account in*

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1   An analysis of the philosophical relationship between Royce and Mead can be seen in VIALE (2007).

2   See VIALE (2008).

3   A clear example of the naturalist interpretation of Mead's philosophy is Herbert Schneider's following paragraph: "Another "seminal mind" among the metaphysicians of radical em-piricism was G. H. Mead. Mead was first of all a social psychologist; he had learned to conceive mind, not in terms of individual consciousness, but in terms of social acts. He might easily have been tempted to follow the idealists like Royce (his teacher) in what he called "the great experience of bringing the whole of reality to experience" and to construct a theory of reality based on the structure of absolute community. But he did the opposite and interpreted the emergence of communities and consciences as a more general process of "natural emergence" (SCHNEIDER, 1947, p. 550). A critical analysis of this interpretation can be seen in VIALE (2007).

4   Of course I am not stating Mead realizes this incoherence and intentionally develops a hypothesis ad hoc. Rather, I am pointing out a tension within Mead's philosophy.

abstraction from the fixed forms of habits and goods which have clashed with each other" (1964, p. 404-5, my italics).[5] If one interprets this article in relation to others articles of the same period,[6] it can be inferred that Josiah Royce's philosophy and the idealist tradition are the limit of the pragmatist tradition in Mead's view.

I finish this section highlighting again that the conception of method and the conception of ideal are necessarily related in Mead's moral philosophy, since *the ideal world arises from the use of the method*. In my view, to the extent that Mead stresses excessively the naturalist features of his philosophy, the theoretical function of the ideal aspects becomes problematic. The lack of nuances of Mead's view of Idealism, his incomprehension of Royce's mature philosophy, and his shortcomings regarding the conception of ideal weakened Mead's moral philosophy.

2. The Necessary Tension Between Ethics as a Method and the Ideal World

For an understanding of the ineludible tension between the Meadean conceptions of ethics as a method and ideal world, one must examine Mead's dictum that ethics is a method and Mead's conception of ideal world. Within Mead's framework, that ethics is a method means that one should analyze all the relevant features of a problematic situation in order to find a *possible rational* solution. Independently of the fundamental nuances of the concept of rationality (I will refer to this issue above) the core of this conception is addressed to *practical purposes*, i.e., in Peircean terms, to fix the belief. This analogy is fundamental to the extent that Peirce is pragmatism's father not only because he has set the cornerstone of falibillism as its decisive mark but because he has emphasized that one needs to have fixed belief in order to act. In other words: ethics as a method fulfils an analogous role to Peircean conception of the fixation of belief. A notable difference, however, between Peirce's and Mead's approaches lies in that the former clearly distinguishes two dimensions: the necessity to have fixed beliefs and the necessity to have true beliefs. An example of the first one is the following paragraph of Peirce's classical article "The Fixation of Belief":

> The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. It is certainly best for us that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject any belief which does not seem to (W3.248) have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in the place of that belief. With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. *Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false.* And it is clear that nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge can be our object, for nothing which does not affect the mind can be the motive for mental effort. The most that can be

5   I have made an analysis of this theme in the last part of my previous article.
6   Especially "The Philosophy of James, Royce and Dewey in their American Setting". An interpretation of this article can be seen in VIALE (2008).

> maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall *think* to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so. (CP 5.376, my italics).

Meanwhile, an example of the second dimension is the following paragraph of Peirce's "How to Make our Ideas Clear"

> This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a fore-ordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the predestinate opinion. This great law is embodied in the conception of truth and reality. The opinion which is fated<?> to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality. (CP 5.408).[7]

Although a careful examination of Peirce's philosophy is beyond my purposes, these paragraphs show the twofold character of Peirce's conception of action: on the one hand, the necessity to fix the belief; on the other, the necessity to reach true beliefs.[8] Therefore, the dialectic between the *finite* or *concrete* and *infinite* or *ideals* characteristic of the action is one of the central nucleus of the Peircean philosophy and pragmatist philosophy as well. This dialectic consists in the perennial interaction between the instance of fixation of the belief and the regulative role of the concept of "truth" and "reality", which always operate "in the long run".

Regarding Mead's moral philosophy, the point to be stressed turns around whether a plausible analogy with the Peircean conception of action can be drawn, i.e., whether there are two dimensions of the action that the theoretical analysis should distinguish. In my view, the two Meadean equivalent conceptions are the *habits* and the *commonwealth of rational beings* or the (theoretical as well as practical) *achievements* of this *commonwealth*. As I have showed in the final pages of my first article, Mead uses both concepts in "Philanthropy from the Point of View of Ethics".[9] The relevance of the concept of habit, explicitly developed within Mead's

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7   It is well known that this article was modified by Peirce. Particularly he changed the term law and used hope. Regarding my current purposes, however, this change does not affect my argument.

8   APEL (1981, p. 58-76) examines carefully this point.

9   "In logical terms there is established a universe of discourse which transcends the specific order within which the members of the community may, in a specific conflict, place themselves outside of the community order as it exists, and agree upon changed habits of action and a restatement of values. Rational procedure, therefore, sets up an order within which thought operates; that abstracts in varying degrees from the actual structure of society. It is a social order, for its function is a common action on the basis of commonly recognized conditions of conduct and common ends. Its claims are the claims of reason. It is a social order that includes any rational being who is or may be in any way implicated in the situation with which thought deals. It sets up an ideal world, not of substantive things but of proper method. Its claim is that all the conditions of conduct and all the values which are involved in the conflict must be taken into account in abstraction from the fixed forms of habits and goods which have clashed with each other. It is evident that a man cannot act

work, lies in its sociological dimension, i.e., the habit, through the internalization of the conventional normative elements of the society, works adapting the individual within a *concrete* society. Meanwhile, the concept of the *Commonwealth of rational beings* carries out a complementary task, i.e., to evaluate the rationality of this concrete society. A presupposition of this last task is that every rational being should agree with a solution to a problem *if one could evaluate* it from a rational point of view. It can be maintained, therefore, that the concepts of *habits* and the *commonwealth of rational beings* carry out a similar task to Peirce's fixation of beliefs and the concepts of "reality" and "truth" respectively.

The problem lies in that Mead's moral philosophy, in spite of their similarities with Peirce's conception of action, through its shortcomings regarding the category of ideal cannot clearly acknowledge the tension between the fixation of belief and its justification *in the long run.* This shortcoming has a precise negative consequence within Mead's philosophy, namely, when he conceives an ideal rising from the use of the method, that is really working here is an *idealized solution* to a concrete moral problem and not a typical *ideal.* The difference between these two concepts lies in the diverse scope they have: an idealized solution attempts to find a (rational) solution without necessarily modifying the standard normative frame; on the other hand, to refer to an ideal could imply to transform radically the current normative frame. I will refer to this point again in the next section.

Regarding the conception of rationality, I have argued that it is a central tenet of Mead's moral philosophy, since it allows analyzing the connection between its empirical and normative aspects. Consequently, it is important to examine whether the rational solution to moral problems from the perspectives of *ethics as a method* and of the *ideal world* involves different philosophical commitments.

It is well known that discussions of rationality turn around *ends* and *means.* Followers of a rationality of means maintain that only the means to achieve an end should be (or can be) evaluated or pondered from a rational point of view. From Hume to Elster, this is a well-known tradition attempting to demonstrate that reason is a slave of passion. The opposite view of rationality maintains that not only means of action but mainly ends of action must be evaluated. A third possible option is a position that attempts to consider rationality beyond the ends/means discussion. In this analytical frame, does Mead propose a conception of rationality of means, a conception of rationality of ends or does Meadean pragmatism try to support an equidistant conception of rationality beyond the means/ends dichotomy? From a careful examination of Mead's argumentation it can be inferred that he uses both a rationality of means and a substantive rationality of ends. Although I criticize Mead's theoretical ambiguities, I think both conceptions must be maintained; otherwise his theoretical frame becomes irremediably incoherent.

To begin with, Mead's conception of ethics as a method (that one must consider all the values involved in a problematic situation and that the action must be rational) can only coherently refer to an "instrumental" conception of rationality. In other words, the logic of action he develops does not attempt to evaluate mainly

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as a rational member of society, except as he constitutes himself a member of this wider commonwealth of rational beings". MEAD (1964, p. 404-5, my italics).

the end of action but *its effectiveness as a solution for a concrete moral problem.* As a result, when a problematic moral situation arises, following this *pragmatist* logic, the self will try to immediately restore the lost balance and in this sense the *working* of a hypothesis can be thought of as the cornerstone of this moral conception. From the pragmatist theory of action it can be inferred that the self mainly needs its habitual action not to be problematic. This statement does not imply that in Mead's conception there is no room to appeal to a broader conception of rationality and, therefore, to a larger society; but, for him the self's adaptation to its social environment (or, in stronger words, *to its immediate or concrete social environment*) is the central feature of moral action as can be inferred from theses 1-3 analyzed in my previous article.

I am not paraphrasing the usual critics of pragmatism, stating that pragmatist moral philosophy or the Meadean philosophy reduces solution of moral problems to a narrow utilitarianism. I am saying that, following Mead's logic of action and regarding his sociological perspective, the theoretical consequence is that *the general frame in which the problematic moral situation emerges is rarely put into question.* In my view, this logic is an accurate description of the agent's moral behavior but it is insufficient in the process of moral justification.

On the other hand, Mead argues that his methodological approach ("The claims of the ideal world are that the individual shall take into account all of the values which have been abstracted from their customary settings by the conflict and fashion his reconstruction in recognition of all of them", 1964, p. 405) sets up an ideal, denominated by Mead a *democratic ideal.* This democratic ideal is useful in the task to overcoming social restrictions (1964, 406), task that in Mead's terms can be called progress: "We vaguely call it 'progress'" (1964, p. 407). The adverb vaguely shows again the problematic character of the category of ideal within Mead's moral philosophy, since it needs a conception of ideal in order to overcome the concrete restrictions of society but with the adverb vaguely he attempts to put aside the theoretical consequences of this necessity. Taking again the conception of rationality, his implicit idea related to this Meadean conception cannot be the instrumental one that I have just analyzed but a substantive conception, since this is not a valuation joined with the working of a hypothesis in a particular situation but with *ideal* values. Rationality does not work here pondering the effectiveness of a particular solution for a moral problem but analyzing and grounding desirableness of moral features.

Then, in what sense is there a necessary tension between both conceptions? They respond to different and irreducible requirements for a moral philosophy. The task of ethics as a method is to evaluate the possibility of success of a moral hypothesis, while the ideal world relates desirable features with independence of their current realizability. My view is that both are necessary in order to accurately describe all the dimensions of the moral action. Therefore, my central criticism of Mead's moral philosophy is that it does not visualize and recognize the necessity of the tension between them. As a result, one finds in his philosophy the contradictory tendency to, on the one hand, deny any kind of reality or necessity for ideal stages and, on the other, incorporate a rather unclear distinction between empirical and ideal aspects. Therefore, the contradictory tendency involves that, on the one hand, Mead fails to recognize the importance of regulative stages and

what I have called the "fixation" of moral elements that prevails in his conception and, on the other hand, in some passages of his articles he recognizes the necessity to hold the existence of ideal stages but he derives them inadequately from his conception of method and consequently, he does not *coherently* incorporate them into the fixation stage.

3. The Ideal World: Does it Spring from the Conception of Method or is it an Independent Postulate?

I have illustrated the way in which Mead's moral philosophy oscillates between rejection of ideal stages and their problematic inclusion. His assertion that the ideal world springs from the use of method is part of that problematic incorporation and cannot be maintained coherently. Regarding this issue I develop my argument in two interrelated parts: that the concept of ideal world has two possible different meanings within Mead's moral philosophy; that the conception of ideal world cannot coherently spring from the use of method.

My first criticism to Mead's conception of ideal world refers to two possible different meaning that this concept has within his philosophy. The first meaning turns around a hypothetical reconstruction that attempts to solve a moral problem in a concrete frame of values. If one follows Mead's conception of ethics as a method *strictly* (to consider all the values involved in the situation and to act rationality in relation to them) and relates it with Mead's sociological frame, one can infer that this hypothetical reconstruction works as an idealized solution to a concrete moral problem more than as an ideal in the Meadean sense, since for Mead an ideal involves more than the methodological requirement to rationally reconstruct the values involved in the problematic moral situation. In other words: in the Meadean frame a *proper* conception of ideal entails a democratic instance:

> The claims of the ideal world are that the individual shall take into account all of the values which have been abstracted from their customary settings by the conflict and fashion his reconstruction in recognition of all of them […] That is, they have been given a form which abstracts them from the restrictions which economic, feudal, and cultural class distinctions lay upon great numbers in the community. This sets up what may be called the 'democratic ideal' of removing such restrictions. (1964, p. 405-6).

Therefore, there are two possible grains in Mead's philosophy regarding the conception of ideal: the methodological claim that all the relevant element of the problematic moral situation should be considered, that I call *idealized solution*; and the (regulative) *democratic* ideal working in the long run. Although it is possible to complement them, conceptually they should be sharply distinguished. One could coherently think, for example, in Mead's dictum to consider all the values involved in the situation and to act rationally in relation to them within an asymmetrical society. When a moral problem appears within this society, one can propose a rational reconstruction regarding the values involved without a necessary commitment to a democratic regulative ideal, i.e., one can propose a rational reconstruction that maintains the *statu quo*. As a result, the consequence of the lack of distinction between both conceptions entails

a theoretical problem. In other words, Mead seems imprisoned between the Scylla of Situationalism and the Charybdis of Universalism.[10]

These monsters are born out of Mead's theoretical fundaments: the Scylla of Situationalism out of Mead's thesis that the central core of moral philosophy lies in self's concrete situations (even the instance of legitimation of concrete actions); meanwhile, the Charybdis of Universalism out of his thesis that democracy is morally superior to any other social system as well as his confidence in the reason as a medium to resolve conflicts. Then, Mead's moral philosophy is imprisoned by two opposite tendencies that collide for theoretical preeminence: on the one hand, the universalistic grain that weakens the importance of Mead's situationalist statements; on the other, the situationalist vein that undermines his universalistic vigor. This oscillation of Mead's moral philosophy has its correlate in the bifurcated way it has tended to be understood in the literature.[11] I insist, however, that the problem does not lie in these theses taken individually but in its connection, i.e., another link between them could conquer the monsters.

Thus, the nucleus of this issue is why the link between situationalism and universalism is problematic within Mead's work. The answer to this problem is the core of my second criticism, i.e., that a conception of ideal world or democratic ideal does not spring coherently from his conception of method as Mead argues. The core of the critique has two parts. The first can be shown in the following way: *the idea that from the use of the method a "democratic ideal" is established entails the Meadean approach to an unfortunate theoretical inconsistency, since if from the mere use of the method a democratic "ideal world" is established, then Mead's situationalism is meaningless.* On the other hand, *if Mead's situationalism is meaningful, a democratic ideal does not necessarily arise from the use of the method.* Situationalism means that the features of a moral situation should be understood and justified in its social context (I think this is a solid inference grounded on the theses 1-3 I have analyzed in the previous article). Besides, Mead's idea of a reconstructive method (to consider all the relevant values for a problematic situation and to suggest a rational solution) is not restricted to democratic societies. Given this frame, how can a democratic ideal world arise from the *mere* application of the reconstructive method as Mead understands it? Or, if this is the case (and a

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10 I have taken this metaphor from Susan Haack's article "Between the Scylla of Scientism and the Charybdis of Apriorism".

11 Two illustrative examples are HABERMAS (1984) and KEITH (1999). The former highlights only the "idealist" (consensualist) aspect of Meadean philosophy and its universalistic features. In my view, this inference is unacceptable for any serious consideration of Mead's conception of ethics as a method. From a position diametrically opposed to Habermas's, some exponents of feminist theory, among them Keith, point out mainly the situational aspects of Mead's moral philosophy relating it to an "ethics of care". In other words, both inadequately emphasize one aspect of Mead's moral philosophy and present it as Mead's moral philosophy in totum. While Habermas highlights only the idealist or consensual aspect of Mead's oeuvre leaving aside the pragmatist theory of action, Keith stresses only the situational aspects of Mead's moral philosophy and fails to consider its universalistic mark. In my opinion – and apart from theoretical discussions– inadequate treatment of Mead's articles is responsible for such misinterpretations.

democratic ideal world arise from the application of the reconstructive method) which is the normative scope of situationalism? When one attempts to follow the theoretical consequences of the Meadean "ideal world" in order to analyze a traditional (non-democratic) society, for example, one realizes that this ideal inevitably entails a commitment to the use of an *external* standard to evaluate it; commitment that contradicts Mead's explicit situationalist vein. Therefore, in order to gain conceptual precision, a sharp distinction between what I call "idealized solution" and the "democratic ideal" should be drawn. The first does not necessarily collide with the normative framework of the society where a moral problem arises; while the second should be conceived as an explicit postulate or regulative ideal. In my view, nothing, either from a conceptual point of view or from a historical point of view, indicates that there is a necessary conceptual linkage between the use of the method *à la Mead* and the development of a democratic ideal world. I think that the inconsistency I am highlighting results from Mead's groundless evolutionism, i.e., from the idea of an inevitable progressive development of history that underlies his thought. This evolutionism prevents Mead from recognizing that the democratic ideal world does not spring from the use of the method *but* it is a postulate independent of method.

The second part of this critic refers to an ambivalence in Mead's thought. Sometimes he seems to maintain that his conception of ethics as a method is valid not only for democratic systems. In (1964, p. 405-6),[12] for example, he writes that the democratic ideal is set up in a non-democratic context. Sometimes, however, an *existent* democratic society is presented as a precondition to the rational working of hypotheses: "It is clear, however, that reason would operate in a vacuum, unless these values of enlightenment – of science, aesthetic appreciation, and human associations – can take on forms which are freed from the social restrictions placed upon them by the groups which have possessed them" (1964, p. 405). This restriction is not necessarily mistaken but it is incoherent within Mead's theoretical frame.

Therefore, does Mead's methodological dictum require a democratic background to work or not? From my argument shown above it can be inferred that Mead inadvertently maintains the two positions. In my view the origin of this ambivalence is that Mead does not visualize (like Peirce) the necessary tension between the method and the ideal, caused mainly by Mead's shortcomings regarding his conception of the latter. In other words: if one does not attempt to spring the ideal from the method this problem disappears. Summing up, the cause of the tension of Mead's moral philosophy lies in the attempt to simultaneously and inadvertently hold two tendencies: first, a universalistic as well as a situationalist view of morals; second, a belief that a democratic ideal world arises from the use of method. Since the second is unsustainable, the strength of the first attempt is weakened. Mead's moral philosophy tries to maintain a *situationalist* viewpoint grounded on a descriptive or sociological basis with a *universalistic* view grounded in a democratic idea of justification. This attempt is coherent only if descriptive and normative aspects are clearly distinguished. In other words: the Meadean democratic ideal world demands an independent postulation from the method.

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12 Quoted in this article (Section 3).

4. Conclusions

I have analyzed Mead's moral philosophy with a twofold purpose: first, to contribute to the resurgence of classical pragmatism, especially to the pragmatist practical philosophy; second, to point out an internal tension in Mead's moral philosophy. Therefore, valuable aspects of Mead's moral philosophy should be reconstructed if my diagnosis is correct. Two reconstructive alternatives can be thought of in order to overcome Meadean shortcomings: on the one hand, to consider the conception of *ethics as a method* and *ideal world* only for democratic societies; on the other hand, to visualize the tension between empirical and normative aspects and to propose a philosophical reconstruction that explains it adequately.

Regarding the first alternative, limiting the scope of Mead's moral philosophy to democratic societies is a possible strategy.[13] As a result, Mead's *democratic ideal world* could spring coherently from his conception of method since it would not be *external* to democratic societies. Through this reconstruction, Mead's moral philosophy could be conceived more as a *normative* appreciation about how morals should work in a democratic society than as an attempt to explain how moral problems arise and are solved in any kind of society. Of course, there would be obvious costs to be paid for this reconstruction. First of all, the universalistic Meadean point of view in moral philosophy would be abandoned, as well as the project to offer a relevant linkage between the socio-psychological aspects of morals and its normative nucleus.

However, I think a second reconstructive alternative is possible, an alternative that attempts to do justice to the ambitious scope of Mead's thought. Instead of maintaining that a democratic ideal world springs from the use of method, the core of this reconstructive alternative states a clear distinction between them. This reconstructive strategy recognizes that the source of the inconsistency in Mead's moral philosophy lies in an inadequate step: to attempt to derive the ideal world from the use of method. This implies the recognition of the profound divergence between the logic of ethics as a method and the logic of democratic ideal world. In my view, this recognition should be the fundamental core in order to fully recover the theoretical importance of Mead's moral philosophy.

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13 This is a widely and valid strategy in contemporary moral philosophy. Rawls's is perhaps one of the most important philosophical conceptions that defend this position. See (1999, xi).

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