

The Role of Revision in Dewey's Inquiry and Ethics

O papel da revisão na investigação e ética em Dewey

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Abstract: According to Dewey inquiry proceeds from uncertainty to integration and control. Even if Dewey pays attention to the incompleteness of nature, to the modification and revision of primary generalizations by more elaborated conceptions, to the necessity of introducing changes in the world in order to carry an experimental inquiry, to the possibility of re-determine the interdependent constituents in a "transaction", he seems not to be aware of the instability that this process of revision implies: we do not know in advance whether a newly undertaken revision is a progress or a waste of time. If we accept this consequence of pragmatism, how can we be confident in the truth of our beliefs, if we know in advance that most of them are to be revised, and that even if our belief is by chance a really true one, it could be reasonable some day to pay attention to some counter-argument that would induce us to revise it. How can be maintained the practical force of an obligation, if all norms are to be revised someday, and if we never know whether our favorite norms are really not been revised? The stability that pragmatism seems to aim at could be obtained by studying the relation between two opposite revisions, where some properties of symmetry and fairness can be required and defined, in a "transactional" fashion that is reminiscent of Dewey. When these properties are not satisfied, it will be true forever that we are and will be entitled to require a revision of the situation. But then, the core of pragmatism is the revolt against what is unfair, a negative content. On the contrary, Dewey has always insisted upon the positive effect of negative situations, seeing failure as learning and negation as positive determination.

Key-words: pragmatism, Dewey, inquiry, revision, ethics, democracy, transaction.

Resumo: Segundo Dewey, a investigação procede da incerteza à integração e ao controle. Mesmo Dewey prestando atenção à incompletude da natureza, à modificação e revisão das generalizações por concepções mais elaboradas, à necessidade de introduzir mudanças no mundo de forma que conduza a uma investigação experimental, à possibilidade de re-determinar os constituintes interdependentes em uma "transação", ele parece não estar consciente da instabilidade que esse processo de revisão implica: nós não sabemos de antemão se uma nova revisão realizada é um progresso ou uma perda de tempo. Se aceitarmos essa consequência do pragmatismo, como podemos estar confiantes na veracidade de nossas crenças, já que sabemos de antemão que a maior parte delas deverá ser revisada? E mesmo se nossa crença for efetivamente verdadeira, poderia ser razoável algum dia prestar atenção a algum contra-argumento que poderia induzir-nos a revisá-la. Como pode ser mantida a força prática de uma obrigação, se todas as normas

deverão ser revisadas algum dia, e se nunca sabemos se nossas normas favoritas não estão efetivamente sendo revisadas? A estabilidade que o pragmatismo parece buscar poderia ser obtida estudando-se a relação entre duas revisões opostas, em que algumas propriedades de simetria e justiça podem ser requeridas e definidas, em uma maneira “transacional” ao modo de Dewey. Quando essas propriedades não são satisfeitas, será verdadeiro para sempre que nós estamos e seremos encarregados de requerer uma revisão da situação. Mas, então, o centro do pragmatismo é a revolta contra o que é injusto, um conteúdo negativo. Ao contrário, Dewey sempre insistiu sobre o efeito positivo das situações negativas, enxergando o erro como aprendizado e a negação como determinação positiva.

Palavras-chave: pragmatismo, Dewey, inquirição, revisão, ética, democracia, transação.

Pragmatists emphasise the dynamical aspect of knowledge and ethics, and notice that they are embedded in a cultural and historical background. In order for our knowledge and values to evolve, the previous beliefs and values have to be revised. No dynamics of knowledge and ethics without revision. But is every revision a step towards a better understanding of the world and towards better practices? How can we be sure that the successive steps of revision can progress and converge on a more accurate and encompassing knowledge? Optimistic pragmatists like Dewey seem to presuppose as obvious the success of this progress and the convergence of the successive revisions. But if you presuppose some convergence point, aren't you presupposing a preexistent truth in a realistic fashion? And if you do not presuppose it, how can you have a reasonable hope that your knowledge and ethics are always becoming better and better?

First we will show how sensitive was Dewey to the dynamics of knowledge and ethics, then we will make explicit how questionable are the convergence and progress of successive revisions. Nevertheless we will find a kind of judgement immune to the instability of revision (namely in ethics: the disapproval of asymmetric and unjust relations) and eventually we will show that when Dewey emphasises the openness of both the democratic process and the inquiry as the fundamental requirement for every progress (in politics but also in cultural practices in general), he is defining in advance the forum where these forever stable disapprovals can be expressed.

1. The dynamics of inquiry

Dewey's conceiving of the inquiry is thoroughly dynamical. “There is no inquiry that does not involve the making of some change in environing conditions” (12: 1938, *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry*, 41¹). For him knowledge is interaction as action is.

1. Dewey's works are quoted in the collected works edition of Southern Illinois Press, Jo Ann Boyston, ed. Carbondale and Edwardsville, USA.

Interaction is a universal trait of natural existence. "Action" is the name given to one mode of this interaction, namely, that named from the stand-point of an organism. When interaction has for its consequence the settling of future conditions under which a life-process goes on, it is an "act". If it be admitted that knowing is something which occurs within nature, then it follows as a truism that knowing is an existential overt act. (4: 1929, *The Quest for Certainty*, 195).

Knowledge is not the access to previously hidden but existing realities, but the active determination of that was previously badly determined. "Knowledge is an affair of making sure, not of grasping antecedently given sureties" (1: 1925, *Experience and Nature*, p. 123).

Dewey shifts the emphasis from the realities we could contemplate to the method, the way we interact, in a kind of transaction that changes both the subject and his object, and transforms things into events and relations. He suggests a

shift of the emphasis from the experienced, the objective subject-matter, the *what*, to the experiencing, the method of its course, the *how* of its changes. Such a shift occurs whenever the problem of control of production of consequences arises. As long as men are content to enjoy and suffer fire when it happens, fire is just an objective entity which is what it is. ... But when men come to the point of making fire, fire is not an essence, but a mode of natural phenomenal, an order in change, a "how" of a historic sequence... Making fire is relational. (1:1925, 181)

The significance of things resides in the consequences that they produce when they interact with other specified things. The heart of experimental method is determination of the significance of observed things by means of deliberate institution of modes of interaction (12:1938, 504).

This emphasis on making things, on interaction, relation, method, process, is a well known feature of pragmatism. As Dewey says, "we know an object when we know how it is made, and we know how it is made to the degree in which we ourselves make it" (1: 1925, 319). But Dewey extends this relation between knowing and experimenting consequences even to the principles of logic. Logical principles are evaluated by their consequences, and they are selected as the principles that have been proved in the evolution of the inquiry to be reliable regarding their capacity to make useful connections and inferences. "They represent conditions which have been ascertained during the conduct of continued inquiry to be involved in its own successful pursuit" (12: 1938, 19). A hypothetical proposition (universal propositions are hypothetical ones)

is tested and retested as a hypothesis by its productive capacity in the institution of other universal propositions, while it is finally tested by the existential consequences of its application to matter-of-fact conditions. Its proof lies in these consequences, as the proof of a pudding is in the eating (12: 1938, 315).

Even if Dewey is particularly sensitive to the dynamical aspect of the inquiry and considers logic as the form that emerges from the inquiry itself (at least he mentions this as his *prima facie* hypothesis at the beginning of the book, but nothing defeats the hypothesis in the following pages), he is reluctant to isolate the inferential process in itself, and he considers inference only as embedded in an ongoing process of experimental inquiry, in which induction and deduction

cannot be separated. “The isolation of this <inferential> phase from the total inquiry context results in conversion of functional values into the kind of ontological existence that is then called mental” (12:1938, p. 515), and Dewey condemns this substantification of the mental. But Dewey does not reduce immediately universal propositions to their existential and practical consequences. On the contrary, he knows that the capacity of universals to go far beyond the present particular situation is a necessary tool for the extension of our practical powers through the inquiry. If “the existential basis of a universal proposition is a mode of action<,> a universal proposition is not, however, merely a formulation of a way of acting or operating ...Through symbolisation of proposition formulation they represent possible ways of acting” (12/1938, 270-71).

The universal hypothetical <if-then> states the relation between the operation and its consequences, the consequences being taken as themselves of operative force in the continuum of experience, not merely as final and hence isolated (12:1938, 273).

Even particular propositions are relational ones, relative to some possibility of change. “‘This is red’ means, when it is analysed from a logical point of view, that an object has changed from what it was, or is now changing into something else”(12:1938, 307). “Proposition of one of a kind are also relational. Their reference is not to a particular change taking place, but to dispositions or potentialities of change” (Ibid, 308). Dewey fights against any kind of essentialism, and replaces content by “subject-matter”, which

“stands for possible ways and ends of resolution. It anticipates a solution, and is marked off from fancy because, or, in so far as, it becomes operative in instigation and direction of new observations yielding new factual material” (12:1938, 121).

Content-matter is but the anticipation of the dynamics of inquiry, including its experimental consequences.

I have insisted upon the deweyan way to consider logic because it seems to imply Dewey’s peculiar sensitivity to two things: anticipation and test. Dewey does not see logic as the calculus preserving truth and extension, or as a theory of proof, as Frege or Gentzen have presented it. For him logic is the way to link the anticipation of possibilities to their specification and testing by future experiments. But he does not put the problem in a formal mode of presentation. He does not ask in advance whether some proposition can or cannot be tested (or demonstrated), and, for example, he does not care of something like recursive enumerability – which is a logical notion elaborated at the end of Dewey’s life. As we know, when we try to know in advance whether something will be accessible to our knowledge in the future, we can be sure that by using an iterative method we will find the result we are looking for, on the condition that this result is an formula belonging to a recursively enumerable list. To use algorithms and iterative methods in order to find something which is demonstrated not to be recursively enumerable is hopeless. Dewey does not care about what information recursive enumerability can give us in advance, because for him, test is always a particular event, which cannot be totally determined in advance, and which can change something to the significance of the proposition we are examining. But even if this prevents Dewey

to see the formal problem related to the recurrence of the operation of revision, his attention to the relation between anticipation of possibilities and testing by consequences inclines him to give to revision a central role in the process of inquiry.

2. The place of revision in Dewey's thought.

Even if the word "revision" does not appear in the index of the collected works of Dewey, the word and the notion are strongly associated in Dewey's thought to the concept of inquiry. He mentions "the self-corrective process of inquiry" (12: 1938, 13). He is aware that any result of inquiry could be one day revealed inaccurate and being corrected. "Inquiry is a continuing process in every field with which it is engaged. The "settlement" of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion will always remain settled. The attainment of settled beliefs is a progressive matter; there is no belief so settled as not to be exposed to further inquiry" (12: 1938, 16). Not only there is no guarantee that a particular conclusion is valid forever, but "just as it would be hard to find an instance of a scientific hypothesis that turned out to be valid in precisely the same form in which it was first put forward, so it would be hard in any important scientific undertaking to find an initial proposition about the state of facts that has remained unchanged throughout the course of inquiry in respect to its content and its significance". The history of science also shows that when hypotheses have been taken to be finally true and hence unquestionable, they have obstructed inquiry and kept science committed to doctrines that later turned out to be invalid" (12: 1938, 145).

This openness to revision is linked with the status of logic as relating hypothetical and anticipating universals to the test of whether their consequences are obtained or not in a controlled experiment. As a matter of fact, these requirements are the three pillars of inquiry, "the three indispensable logical conditions of conceptual subject-matter in scientific method":

1. the status of theoretical conceptions as hypotheses which
- 2) have a directive function in control of observation and ultimate practical transformation of antecedent phenomena, and which
- 3) are tested and continually revised on the ground of the consequences they produce in existential application (12:1938, 499).

But Dewey seems to use the word "revision" in the way that we use it to describe what a writer is doing when he is "revising" his manuscript for the final publication. His corrections are only adjustments, he is not calling his whole works into question. For Dewey, when an experiment is in contradiction with our fundamental hypotheses, this does not result in a destruction of our knowledge, but only in the opening of new domains of knowledge. "When the Michelson-Moreley experiment disclosed, as a matter of gross experience, facts which did not agree with the results of accepted physical laws, physicists did not think for a moment of denying the validity of what was found in that experience, even though it rendered questionable an elaborate intellectual apparatus and system", notices Dewey, with

such an emphasis that we could think that he defines scientific inquiry mainly by its sensitivity to the strength of the negative impact of a conflict between theory and experiments, and gives to revision the capacity to destroy a theory. But a few lines later, he writes:

this task of re-adjustment compelled not only new reasonings and calculations in the development of a more comprehensive theory, but opened up new ways of inquiry into experienced subject-matter ... In short, the material of refined scientific method is continuous with that of the actual world as it is concretely experienced (1:1925, 38).

Revision is not breakdown, it is just a process of re-adjustment that ensures the continuity of the relation between inquiry and experience, and the possibility for the scientific research to progress indefinitely within a forever open horizon.

This positive account of the negative impact of revision is confirmed by the analysis that Dewey gives of the relations between uncertainty and certainty in the human research. Coping with indetermination is the human task. “The immediate precarious, the point of greatest need, defines the apex of consciousness, its intense or focal mode. And this is the point of *re*-direction, of *re*-adaptation, *re*-organization” (1: 1935, 236). But if *re*-vision is the apex of consciousness, we have to explain why quest for certainty is a fundamental trend of humanity. Men are so found of certainty because they live in an uncertain world. As the actual world is uncertain, they tend to focus on stable and apparently certain things. They identify “reality with what is sure, regular and finished” (1: 1925, 47), because “the world of empirical things includes the uncertain, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and hazardous” (1: 1925, 43). Dewey fights against this trend, inasmuch it is the root of the platonistic attitude: disqualification of the empirical as illusory and focusing on supposed ideal realities. But the uncertainty is positivized by Dewey, as it is now the first step of an operation of determination, which comes from a more uncertain to a more certain state. “Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (12: 1938, 108). In the same way, “judgement has been analysed to show that it is a continuous process of resolving an indeterminate, unsettled situation into a determinately unified one, through operations which transform subject-matter originally given” (12: 1938, 283).

But as Dewey is conscious that inquiry is a self-corrective and ongoing process, he has to cope with the fact that revision can and will occur at any steps, even at the more determinate ones. He offers us a cyclic solution of this problem. “Every change when it is subjected to inquiry is a round or cycle of events whose beginning and ending are determined by the indeterminate situation undergoing resolution (and hence are not absolute)” (12:1938, 222). A solution is considered as such only if the instability and indeterminacy that it resolves are still a problem: “a solution ceases to be a solution and becomes a bare incident of existence when its antecedent generating conditions of doubt, ambiguity and search are lost from its context”(1: 1925, 58). As we are sure that this cycle is going on further and further, we know in advance that each settlement of a theory is a provisory one, but also that each return to indetermination is followed by a new step of determination and unification.

Apparently, Dewey thinks – which is not a straightforward consequence- that the sequence of these steps of determination, undetermination, determination again is in addition a progress bringing more determination at each determinative step. The sequence or inquiry is a thoroughly cumulative and self-improving one. No doubt, for Dewey, that revision will always be an improvement. Dewey seems to think that in order to cope with the problems of revision, we have just to shift from the realistic and immutable account of knowledge, and to focus on the creativity of our activities of changing the world. This is for him the real meaning of the Copernican revolution.

The new centre is indefinite interactions taking place within a course of nature which is not fixed and complete, but which is capable of direction to new and different results through the mediation of intentional operations...There is a moving whole of interacting parts; a centre emerges wherever there is effort to change them in a particular direction (4: 1929, 232).

We will have to question this optimism based on activism, but we have first to notice that such a “revisionist” account has another virtue for Dewey.

The need for constant revision and expansion of moral knowledge is one great reason why there is no gulf dividing non-moral knowledge from which is truly moral. At any moment conceptions which once seemed to belong exclusively to the biological or physical realm may assume moral import (7: 1932, Ethics, with James Hayden Tuft, 282).

The underlying idea is the following: if moral knowledge was a knowledge of platonistic moral realities, it would be an immutable one, immune to any change of our factual knowledge about the world. But it is not the case. So what could be the sources for revision and expansion of moral knowledge? The platonician would say: the discovery of new moral realities. This would explain expansion, but not revision. But the platonician could explain revision by acknowledging the possibility that some previous knowledge would be revealed illusory (a dangerous move for him!). Dewey prefers to focus on the fact that “moral life is a *life*, and life means power to adjust to changing conditions” (7: 1932, 462). Moral life is action in a changing world, and actions which change the world, as well as autonomous changes of the world, are reasons for our moral life to change. So our revision is not only triggered by the discovery of our previous illusions, but by re-adjustments of our moral rules to the changes of the world. Ethical science discovers the laws and principle of moral life only by “tracing and interpreting this process of growth and adjustment” (7: 1932, 462). As “moral conceptions and processes grow naturally out of the very conditions of human life” (7: 1932, 308), the facts of human life are sources for the revision of the moral knowledge, and moral knowledge cannot be isolated from factual one, which cannot be itself isolated from action. Scientific inquiry and ethics are not to be separated.

3. The problems of revision.

Was Dewey justified in being so optimistic with respect to revision? Maybe not. Suppose that we discover by experience that one of our habits, that we previously

find advantageous, has some bad consequence. This gives us an incentive for revising this habit. But is it a sufficient reason to change our habit? Let aside the cases in which we see immediately what is the action that should be done instead of following our familiar routine. This change is triggered by specific and salient property of the situation. We suspend our habit in this case, but save it for other future situations. This is not a real revision of our habit.

Imagine now that our policy would be the following: we do not change our habit at the first bad consequence, but we change it if we can notice that this policy gets as effects a sufficient amount of bad consequences. This seems to be a reasonable policy. It could be difficult at first to determine how high is this amount, and to settle the threshold for revision. But we reapply the same method, and first choose a threshold that we can revise afterwards.

Are we out of trouble? Imagine the whole set of opportunities and difficulties that can be possibly encountered as a kind of landscape, the basins of which are the opportunities and the ridges are the difficulties. Our policy ensures us not to stay on a ridge, neither to take a little ripple mark as a steep ridge. But it does not ensure us not to stay in a rather large basin, but separated by a huge ridge or a plateau from a more profound and larger basin. Notice that this situation is the more frequent one, if our landscape is complex, as the major part of our landscape consists in non optimal basins. So we know in advance that if the landscape is a bit complex, and not reduced to one huge basin, we will have someday to revise even when we are staying in a domain that appears to us as satisfying and where the majority of our actions seem to be successful. Even if the ridges that we had to climb over are high, it is highly probable that in order to reach the optimum we ought to climb over them. The only sensible policy is to explore the whole landscape, and to consider any threshold as having to be overcome some day.

But even this revision-to-death policy could not be appropriate. Suppose that we are in a rather large and deep basin, and get over a ridge. The next basin is not so deep, so we climb over the next ridge again. After having repeated this move again and again, we find finally a deeper basin. But in fact, if there could have been an external observer which can see the whole landscape, he would have seen that the really optimal basin was not this one but one nearer our first one, in the opposite direction, so that our succession of revision has moved us very far from the optimum. The revision-to-death policy requires us to make all our revisions back, but the problem is that we do not share the overview of the external observer. And maybe the revision-to-death policy overcomes our practical possibilities.

Pragmatists will reply that we have not to care about what is the optimum in a supposed reality independent from our inquiry and our practical possibilities. The landscape we are moving in and its optimum are defined relatively to our practical possibilities and history, to the ways we have created in it. If we move away from a supposed optimum, it does not remain an optimum if the energy we have to spend in order to come back to it is taken into account when computing its optimality. Our moves in the landscape change the landscape itself.

This seems true. But then the problem of what policy of revision it is rational for us to choose becomes still more complex. To undertake a revision makes by this very decision the revision back more difficult. This might raise the threshold up. Would pragmatism make us more conservative than realism? No, because now a

moderately deep basin becomes an optimum if we have reached it by an exhausting revision, which makes our coming back impossible and our first basin sub-optimal. But repeating the same reasoning makes any smaller basin optimal, provide that we have reached it by a long path of revisions! In other words, as we decide to revise only with respect to how much energy we have expended in previous revision and how much unsatisfied we are with our present situation, each revision might seem a good move. Our evaluation of how deep is the new basin depends itself upon how good seems the previous move of revision, and we have no way of comparing the depth of two basins but to experience it from the basin we are in and in accordance with the path we have followed, as we have no possibility of an external and overhanging sight.

Fortunately, a long path of revisions gives us a chance to fall in a deeper basin from time to time, so that depth is not only determined by the effort expended in revisions. But in order to find this blessed basin, we have to try revisions even when the changing landscape makes ridges higher. In this way, we come back to a policy very similar to the revision-to-death one, except for the death. Then all the previous problems related to how to choose a policy revision are coming back again.

To summarize, when the world seems to contradict repeatedly our expectations, it seems rational to revise them. But let us suppose that this sequence of discrepancies was due to our moving in an exceptional region of the world. Then this revision will move us far away from the normal regularities of the world. Revision cannot be guaranteed to improve our knowledge, even if it improves it in the long term (but how long?). We would want to know in advance what would be the propositions that we would never have to revise. In logic, these propositions are theorems. But we do not obtain them by revision, but by demonstration. To obtain valid propositions by revision boils down to trying to find the theorems by cancelling successively all the non-theorems. But the list of the non-theorems is a not recursively enumerable one. There is no final solution to the problem of what policy of revision to choose. We choose one in accordance with how much energy we still have and how much unsatisfied we are by our present situation. But when applying such a pragmatic policy we cannot be sure that revision will always be a move that will improve our situation. The optimistic pragmatist underestimates the problems of revision.

4. Revision and democracy

Revision is the only way to improve our situation, but revision is not guaranteed to improve it in the long term. In order to evaluate our paths in the long term, we need stable landmarks, the evaluation of which cannot be changed in the long term by our moves when they change the landscape. Is it possible to find such landmarks? In the physical domain, we rely on the huge difference between an immense universe and our marginal and tiny actions. As long as our modifications of the world will be infinitesimal in comparison with our universe, we will take the universe itself as an landmark. In ethics, the problem is a more acute one, because ethics have the same dimensions as the ones of our actions. Our ethics are modified by the trends of our activities, as Dewey has noticed.

Surprisingly enough, we have such stable landmarks, even if how to integrate these different landmarks in a coherent landscape remains a problem. These landmarks are our revolts against injustice. Such a revolt is justified in the following situation. Suppose two groups of people, each of these groups having its own order of priorities. Suppose that, in order for people of the first group to satisfy desires that have a moderate rank of priority (to their own eyes), the people of the other group are forced to renounce the satisfaction of desires to which they assign a high rank of priority. Surely this situation is an incentive for the second group to revolt against the situation and to change it. As the situation implies a tendency to revise it, we evaluate it as unjust.

Such an evaluation is settled for ever. Even if the second group forces the first one to satisfy one of its priorities at the price for the first group of renouncing one of their favourite priorities, the first situation will remain unjust. One injustice more does not compensate a first one. Of course, both groups can agree on reciprocal frustration of some of their priorities in order to satisfy some other ones. But then they have to be sure that this combination satisfies a priority of a higher rank than the one of the satisfaction of their initial desires. For example if two groups contract and accept to give up some of their demands on their respective possessions, they give peace a higher rank than conflict.

Priorities can be revised. But this revision has to be justified by the very same kind of situation, but between two phases of the same person. If second-rate desires at one time of my life force me to renounce to the satisfaction of some first-rate desire at another time of my life, this is an unjust situation which demands revision. Either I have to give priority to first-rank desires of this second time of my life, or to give priority to the first time of my life. Revision is justified when it increases the coherence of the order of priority of my different desires along my whole life.

The difference between the revision of the relations with other people and the revision of my own priorities is that nobody else than me can revise my priorities. If people do not revise their own priorities when staying in a situation for a long time, and nevertheless persist in showing priorities that are deeply in conflict with this situation, we observers can take their priorities as justified from their own point of view. Then the thing to be revised is not their priorities but the situation that asymmetrically frustrates these priorities.

Our revolts against unjust situations (situations that demand revision) are our stable landmarks in ethics. But there is no guarantee that any revolt can be integrated in a coherent way with any another one. The ethical domain is diverse. One revolt might demand a revision that would put an obstacle to the revision that another one demands. If coherence within the life of one person is a rational requirement, collective coherence between every people is more disputable. The exploration of the landscape of ethics could be more fruitful if done by diverse groups, and this is even more true if the landscape is modelled by the practices of each groups: if one group only would have the power of imposing its revision, the ethical landscape would be impoverished because other ways of modelling it would be excluded. As coming back all along a previous revision is very difficult, a lot of possible ethical landscapes would be excluded, and this is definitively not a good policy of revision.

At this point we cross again Dewey's path. He has pointed out the linkage between inquiry and democracy. Inquiry (practical one as scientific one, because

science and practices are inseparable) is open for new subject-matters and for self-correction. Democracy is no more than the way to keep things overt and open. Democracy is more than a political regime, it is the guarantee that the political debate will be kept open for revision. But it is more than the guarantee of a one way revision – the guarantee of one kind of openness- it is the guarantee of the diversity of the ways of revision. Remember that revolt against an asymmetrical and unjust situation requires from the observer that he is able to understand many different perspectives, many ways of assigning an order of priorities for desires. Tolerance and, more, sensitivity to the differences of priorities between people and groups are needed in order to make use of the only stable landmarks we have in the ethical landscape.

Diversity and openness are ensured by the fact that discussions, deliberations and decision are open processes in democracy, as Dewey conceives it.

Reflective morality demands observation of particular situations, rather than fixed adherence to a priori principles... It is, in short, the method of democracy, of a positive toleration which amounts to sympathetic regard for the intelligence and personality of others, even if they hold views opposed to ours, and of scientific inquiry into facts and testing of ideas (7: 1932, 329).

The property of democracy to be open to an overt discussion gives us a pragmatic way to cope with the main problem of revision, its myopia, its incapacity to see in advance that the path of revision we are engaged on will later appear to be a dead-end. It makes possible a social division of the work of revision, which extends the part of the landscape that can be explored by humanity. Democracies informed by history can retain the memory of dead-ends, and democratic discussion can reevaluate supposed failures. In democracy, “overt” means at the same time open, and open to diverse tendencies, each informed of the progresses and failures of the others. The deweyan democracy is the political framework in which diversity can be developed as “transaction” (which is the way to connect two independent and remote events or actions, according to *The Experience of Nature*, 1:1925, 155). Democracy is the right policy for revision in the complex ethical landscape that the practices of human beings explore and create at the same time.

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