

# A review of Morton White's criticisms concerning Clarence Irving Lewis' theory of valuation and normativity

*Uma revisão da crítica de Morton White referente à teoria da valoração e normatividade de Clarence Irving Lewis*

**Victoria Paz Sánchez García**

Universidad Nacional de La Plata – Argentina  
sanchez.vps@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This paper presents an examination of the critiques put forward by Morton White in his article “Value and Obligation in Dewey and Lewis” (1949), particularly those directed upon C. I. Lewis’ conception of normativity and valuation. The critic states that Lewis, in offering an account of the normative character of ethical judgements, fails to consistently articulate his ethical conception with his theory of knowledge. This leads White to conclude that the pragmatist has no solution for the fundamental problem of ethics. I will argue that such conclusion is wrong. The kernel of my argumentation rests in the thesis that White’s criticism stems from an inaccurate interpretation of Lewis’ conceptualist pragmatism, one that fails to acknowledge the pragmatic *apriorism* which is the key to a proper understanding of his theory of knowledge and to an explanation of the connection and articulation between valuation and normativity within Lewis’ framework. In this line, I will show that, quite on the contrary, Lewis’ epistemology highlights his ethical and normative developments, revealing a naturalistic theory of valuation that is the basis upon which normativity *pragmatically emerges*. I will also maintain that this perspective offers a fruitful conception of values and norms which has not been sufficiently explored; one that confronts ethical skepticism, that can account for the cognitive status of values and norms, and that reclaims the rational character of valuation not only for ethics but also for knowledge and science.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism. Clarence Irving Lewis. Morton White. Knowledge. Normativity. Valuation.

**Resumo:** *Este artigo apresenta um exame da crítica proposta por Morton White em seu artigo “Valor e obrigação em Dewey e Lewis” (1949), em particular, àquela voltada para o conceito de normatividade e valoração de C.I. Lewis. A crítica afirma que Lewis, ao oferecer um caráter normativo dos juízos éticos, malogra ao articular consistentemente a sua concepção ética com a sua teoria do conhecimento. Isso leva White a concluir que o pragmatista não possui uma solução para o problema fundamental da ética. Argumentarei que tal conclusão é equivocada. O núcleo da minha*

*argumentação repousa na tese de que a crítica de White origina-se de uma interpretação incorreta do pragmatismo conceitualista de Lewis, falhando em reconhecer que o apriorismo pragmático é a chave para o entendimento adequado da teoria do conhecimento e para uma explicação da conexão e articulação entre valoração e normatividade no interior da abordagem de Lewis. Nesta linha, mostrarei que, muito pelo contrário, a epistemologia de Lewis destaca os desenvolvimentos éticos e normativos, revelando uma teoria naturalística de valoração que é a base na qual a normatividade emerge pragmaticamente. Sustentarei, também, que essa perspectiva oferece uma concepção profícua de valores e normas que não têm sido suficientemente exploradas; algo que confronta o ceticismo ético, podendo levar em conta o status cognitivo de valores e normas, e que recupera o caráter racional da valoração não apenas para a ética, mas, também, para o conhecimento e a ciência.*

**Palavras-chave:** Pragmatismo. Clarence Irving Lewis. Morton White. Conhecimento. Normatividade. Valoração.

## 1 Introduction

This paper examines the critiques put forward by Morton White in his article “Value and Obligation in Dewey and Lewis” (1949), particularly those directed upon C. I. Lewis’ conception of normativity and valuation.<sup>1</sup> The objections were presented within the context of an interchange that took place around 1949 between Morton White, John Dewey and C. I. Lewis, and whose long development was not fluent but rather inconstant and misunderstood. In such exchange of ideas, White not only suggested that the pragmatists hold conflicting positions, but also that their respective propositions do not succeed in achieving an accurate conception of the validity of ethical norms. More specifically, he stated that Lewis, in offering an account of the normative character of ethical judgements, fails to consistently articulate his ethical conception with his theory of knowledge. This led White to the conclusion that the pragmatist has no solution for the fundamental problem of ethics.

To these objections Lewis replied quite immediately in a public lecture entitled “Practical and moral imperatives”, which was delivered at Swarthmore College in 1949. But there is a chance that this response had remained unknown by White, at least until its publication in 1969 when, after Lewis’ death, several of his unpublished papers were printed under the title Values and Imperatives. Studies in Ethics. Thus in 1963, the critic repeated his earlier criticism in the article “Pragmatism and the scope of science” (Schlesinger and White 1963). From then on, White and Lewis exchanged some letters that never became public, except for a few fragments that can be found cited in White’s article “Peirce’s Summum Bonum and the Ethical

---

1 For an examination of the debate between Dewey and White over the status of value judgments I recommend Robert Sinclair’s article, “Dewey and White on Value, Obligation, and Practical Judgment” (2014).

Views of C. I. Lewis and John Dewey" (WHITE, 1999). However, not even in this last paper did the critic take notice of Lewis' response (WHITE, 1999, p. 1031), even though the Lewisian ethical writings were already available.

According to Gouinlock (1978), these criticisms along with others made by Stevenson have played an important role in reinforcing the idea, long-time sustained, that pragmatism is a defective philosophy. Quite on the contrary, I will maintain that Lewis' pragmatist perspective contains a fruitful and consistent conception of norms and values which has not been sufficiently explored and that is in fact particularly interesting when considering the problem of the relation between values and science, on the one hand, and ethics and science, on the other; a conception that allows not only to highlight the role of values in scientific practice, but also to delineate a philosophy of knowledge that can provide the basis for a critical assessment of those values and norms that guide human action and scientific research. I will lend weight to this hypothesis by focusing on the analysis of the objections put forward by White with respect to Lewis' conception of valuation and normativity.

In relation to this point, the main argument of Lewis' theory of valuation—and, from my point of view, the heart of his developments on normativity—is the thesis that all value judgements are empirical and that valuations represent one type of empirical cognition (LEWIS, 1946, p. viii; p. 365, and ff.). According to White, this thesis is shared by Dewey as well, except for the fact that Lewis draws a crucial distinction between value statements and ethical or normative statements; one that Dewey apparently had omitted. In this sense, the critic considers that Lewis takes a step forward with respect to Dewey's position by introducing this analytical differentiation. However, he also points out that the distinction itself creates a problem within Lewis' theory of knowledge (WHITE, 1949, p. 321) which leads him to conclude that even though Lewis offers a better perspective than Dewey for the analysis of ethics, he also fails in giving an accurate and consistent naturalistic explanation of obligation (WHITE, 1949, p. 329). I will show that none of these claims are precise; that is to say: that Lewis' analytical distinctive definition of value and normative judgments does not conflict with his theory of knowledge, on the one hand; and that the pragmatist does offer an explanation of normativity which is consistently embedded in a naturalistic and pragmatist theory of values, on the other.

In this line, the kernel of my argumentation rests in the thesis that White's criticism stems from an inaccurate interpretation of Lewis' conceptualist pragmatism, one that fails to acknowledge the pragmatic redefinition that the philosopher gives to the analytic-synthetic distinction and its correlative, the *a priori-a posteriori* distinction, within his theory of knowledge. I will argue that these analytical distinctions embody a relation between the terms that is clearly pragmatic, and that this particular understanding of the relation is the key to explain the connection between valuation and normativity within Lewis' framework and to lend weight to its potential for current discussions.

## 2 Morton White's criticism

As mentioned before, the inconsistency that White claims to recognize between Lewis' theory of knowledge and his valuation and normative accounts rests ultimately in an inappropriate interpretation of his analytic-synthetic distinction. Indeed, White begins his argumentation by quoting Lewis: "Valuation is always a matter of empirical knowledge. But what is right and just, can never be determined by empirical facts alone" (LEWIS, 1946, p. 554). This statement is crucial. Lewis certainly proclaims that ethical judgements cannot be determined by empirical facts *alone*. The question to be asked, then, is *what other consideration is required in the determination of normative judgements?* But White seems to overlook this central point—despite explicitly acknowledging it (WHITE, 1949, p. 328)—and simply interprets Lewis as stating that ethical judgements are not empirical *at all*. In his words: "Lewis, unlike Dewey, makes a distinction between value statements and ethical statements, according to which the latter *are not empirical*" (WHITE, 1949, p. 321; *emphasis added*; cf. also 1949, p. 328). This leads White to conclude that: "In denying that ethical statements convey empirical knowledge he [Lewis] joins with those who deny to apprehensions of what is right (as distinct from what has value) the character of empirical truth or falsity and of empirical knowledge" (WHITE, 1949, p. 328). It is worth noticing that the critic reiterated this interpretation in 1999: "[...] he [Lewis] believed that statements about what is obligatory, just, or right *are not empirical*" (WHITE, 1999, p. 1030; *emphasis added*). This clearly shows that White disregards the Lewisian developments on theory of valuation and metaethics published in 1969 that are of paramount importance to this issue, as will be seen below.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, I will show that White's conclusion is not appropriate because, quite on the contrary, ethical or normative statements are not empirically vacuous in Lewis' epistemological framework. In fact, normative judgements are, according to the pragmatist, those value judgements that we *know*—that is to say, upon which we have a justified belief—that constitute the correct or rational manner of action and decision.

White continues his argument by claiming that if Lewis' affirmation quoted above—i.e. that what is right and just can never be determined by empirical facts alone—is juxtaposed with Lewis' theory of knowledge, difficulties arise when it comes to analyzing ethical knowledge (WHITE, 1949, p. 321, and ff.). Indeed, Lewis sustains an epistemological thesis according to which there are only two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of analytical propositions and knowledge of empirical propositions. Considering this, and according to his interpretation, White argues that since ethical judgements are by definition not empirical, then they must be analytical. Therefore, his reasoning leads him to believe that Lewis is faced with two equally unacceptable conclusions: either all true ethical statements are analytic or ethical propositions are not knowledge at all (WHITE, 1949, p. 327-328). This is, from White's perspective, the problem that makes Lewis' normative proposal a failure. But both of White's conclusions turn out to be quite paradoxical considering that they bring Lewis closer

2 White does acknowledge Lewis' *The Ground and Nature of the Right* (1955), but he continues stating that, according to Lewis, normative judgments cannot be established empirically (WHITE, 1999, p. 1034-1035).

to emotivism and non-cognitivism, positions that the pragmatist explicitly rejects in several writings (LEWIS, 1946, and 1969).

The analysis above confronts us with an interpretative mistake since, as I will argue below, in Lewis' conceptualist pragmatism all normative statements are to be determined considering empirical elements as well as analytical or *a priori* ones. Moreover, the *a priori* or analytical element must be conceived, in Lewis' framework, neither from a classical empiricist point of view nor from a Kantian transcendentalism, but from an original pragmatist perspective that allows analyticity to have empirical content and that redefines the *a priori* as a freely taken attitude of mind that regulates the subject's perception, thought and action; an attitude that operates independently of experience, though not of *all* experience.

### **3 Reconstructing C. I. Lewis' response**

As stated earlier, White's conclusions do not hold due to the fact that one of his main premises is mistaken. In effect, the key to overcome the epistemological problem that White puts forward lies in a careful analysis of Lewis' understanding and usage of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Primarily, it is important to notice that, unlike empirical positivism or classical empiricism, for Lewis the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements is neither strict nor exclusive, but gradual, modifiable and, most importantly, it responds to pragmatic criteria. Therefore, it is not the same conception of analyticity that constitutes the target of Quine's attack in the *Two Dogmas of empiricism* (1951). Indeed, in Lewis' framework analyticity is not founded on the idea of *synonymy*—which is the core of Quine's critique—but on the idea of *implication* or *containment*: analytic statements are those which “assert some relations of meanings amongst themselves” and synthetic statements are those which require a relation to some particular experience (LEWIS, 1946, p. 17). Furthermore, for Lewis analytic judgements can have empirical content, thus the difference with respect to synthetic judgements is only gradual and is based on pragmatic grounds. Finally, but not less importantly, there is a correlation between, on the one hand, the analytic, the *a priori*, and the conceptual, all of them concepts which explain the subject's mental activity; and on the other, the synthetic, the *a posteriori*, and the given, all of which account for the way the world is presented. But to properly understand the relation between the terms, we must consider more carefully Lewis' conception of the *a priori*.

The pragmatic apriorism is perhaps Lewis' most original contribution to pragmatism and doubtlessly the core of his conceptualist pragmatism. It constitutes the key to a correct understanding of the conceptual dimension of Lewis' theory of knowledge and of the pragmatism that turns such theory into a methodological tool that functions transversely in experience, inextricably related to action and valuation (SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, 2015, 2015b, 2016). The pragmatic *a priori* is the element of order, classification, and definition which the human mind brings to experience. In Lewis's words:

The *a priori* represents an attitude in some sense freely taken, a stipulation of the mind itself, and a stipulation which might be made in some other way if it suited our bent or need. Such truth is necessary as opposed to contingent, not as opposed to voluntary.

And the *a priori* is independent of experience not because it prescribes a form which the data of sense must fit, or anticipates some preestablished harmony of experience with the mind, but precisely because it prescribes nothing to experience. That is *a priori* which is true, *no matter what*. What it anticipates is not the given, but our attitude toward it: it concerns the uncompelled initiative of mind or, as Josiah Royce would say, our categorical ways of acting. (LEWIS, 1923, p. 169; *emphasis in the original*).

The *a priori* element is neither universal, nor fixed or absolute, but multiple and subject to alteration on pragmatic grounds. It applies previously and independently of present and future *particular* experience, though it is not independent of *all* experience: “Our categories and definitions are peculiarly social products, reached in the light of experiences which have much in common, and beaten out, like other pathways, by the coincidence of human purposes and the exigencies of human cooperation” (LEWIS, 1923, p. 177). Indeed, it does not imply a divorce from the empirical but, rather the opposite, it has a historical and contextual origin, arises from past experience and is freely chosen regarding pragmatic reasons (LEWIS, 1929; 1970; Cf. CALCATERRA, 2009, p. 41-44). In other words, the *a priori* conveys those implicit conceptual principles representing the initiative of mind which are chosen on pragmatic grounds and which function normatively legislating on the subject’s modes of perceiving, thinking, and acting.

In this frame, the *a priori* is analytic in the sense that it defines concepts, criteria, and classifications, i.e., the meaningfulness of experience: “Mind makes classifications and determines meanings; in so doing it creates the *a priori* truth of analytic judgments” (LEWIS, 1923, p. 171). In addition, it is analytic in the sense that it functions with necessity and can be maintained in the face of experience: “Whenever this is so, the subject concept implies or includes the predicate concept and the proposition is *a priori* because the judgment is analytic.” (LEWIS, 1929, p. 294, *emphasis in the original*). In other words, it is the way we *use* certain concepts or judgements that determines their status as *a priori* or *a posteriori*, and as analytic or synthetic. In all cases, the distinction drawn is neither strict nor absolute, and does not respond to ontological criteria. Rather, it is epistemological, and responds to pragmatic criteria (SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, 2015, p. 73, and ff.). In Lewis’ words: “The dividing line between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* is that between principles and definitive concepts which *can* be maintained in the face of all experience and those genuinely empirical generalizations which *might* be proven flatly false” (LEWIS, 1970, p. 238-9; *emphasis in the original*). In this sense, then, both kind of statements—analytic and synthetic, *a priori* and *a posteriori*—are correlative, have empirical implications, are probable and are subject to revision and rejection. Therefore, as Cheryl Misak puts forward, it is quite paradoxical that in 1947 when W. O. Quine, N. Goodman and M. White were “gearing up for a sustained attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction, they identified both Lewis and the logical empiricist as their enemies”, a “turning point in the history of pragmatism” that, according to Misak, deserves an undertaken study from the sociology of knowledge (MISAK, 2013, p. 195–6). In this line and despite most of the interpretations that Lewis

has received, I agree that it is certainly more accurate to affirm that there is not a substantial difference between Lewis' and Quine's perspectives on the issue.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it is possible to think, following Robert Synclair, that:

[...] Lewis had a marked influence on Quine's dismantling of the conceptual-empirical divide in the name of pragmatism, one that is obscured by Quine's remarks but which further indicates that Quine and Lewis both share an epistemological perspective that remains distinct from Carnap's own pragmatism. (SINCLAIR, 2012, p. 350).

In this same vein, Sandra Rosenthal states that:

In a deeply fundamental way, Lewis's pragmatic reconstruction of the *a priori* undercuts, and can change the nature of, the debates about analyticity and the analytic-synthetic distinction, casting 'opposing alternatives' in a new, fruitful, and complementary light (ROSENTHAL, 2007, p. 68, *emphasis in the original*).

From this perspective, White's interpretation of Lewis' epistemological commitments is incorrect and, therefore, misleading. Consequently, his twofold conclusion—that his epistemology comes into conflict with his theory of values and that, in this frame, the latter conducts him to non-cognitivism or inconsistency—, do not follow. Quite on the contrary, Lewis' theory of knowledge not only consistently explains how normativity is related to valuation within a naturalistic perspective, but it also accounts for the validity and foundations of ethics and normativity in general. But in order to be able to solidly state this, I must first introduce some key ideas of Lewis' thought.

---

3 This does not mean there aren't any differences at all between both philosophers. For instance, according to Lewis empirical statements are only probable and may eventually be proven false, whereas *a priori* principles remain true: inasmuch as they are definitional they can be considered useful or useless, but never strictly false. For Quine, however, this distinction is unsustainable insofar as analytic claims also have empirical implications through their inferential connection with other claims, which is why they are probable too and can be rejected on the same basis as empirical statements (SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, 2015, p. 28). Nevertheless, as I explained above, we must take notice that for Lewis analytic statements are such due to pragmatic decisions that can eventually change. In this sense, Cheryl Misak points out that the "... point of difference lies in the fact that Lewis is a champion of intentional logics and concepts, whereas Quine is passionate about a 'sparse' landscape in which only extensional concepts were allowed. This difference might have been what made Quine minimize the similarity between his view and Lewis's" (MISAK, 2013, n. 23). Indeed, we are faced here with an issue that the authors themselves did not resolve. The most Lewis had explicitly said about the conflicts between him and Quine—once *the Two Dogmas* was published—comes from his notes for "Proseminar Lectures on Practical Philosophy in 1952": "Neither of us, as a fact, grasps with absolute clearness and correctness, the full pattern of implications (in my good sense of 'implications' not his bad sense) of his own conceptions. I take it that if, per impossible, we did, we should come to full agreement. But that doesn't enable us fully to agree now" (Quoted in: MURPHEY, 2005, p. 328).

Lewis maintains that valuations and judgements of rightness—such as, for example, ethical judgements—, have usually been classified as “normative” with the main purpose of distinguishing them from other types of judgements, traditionally called descriptive, empirical or scientific. According to him, this has led to an unfortunate confusion that resulted in referring to them indistinctively as “valuations”, and to their object as “values”. Against this, he affirms that the distinction between them is as important as their relation, and emphasizes the difference explaining that:

Basically that distinction is simple: ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ apply to our decisions and our deliberate doing; ‘good’ and ‘bad’ apply to all sorts of things—almost anything you can think of—and are not confined to what may be a consequence of action and need to be considered in deciding what to do (LEWIS, 1969, p. 33).

As the author suggests, judgements of value are more general and comprehensive and constitute the most primitive mode of judgement. Judgements of rightness, on the other hand, are based on the former but are significant only when a deliberate decision that requires normative criteria is at stake. In other words, the consequences of action can be good or bad, but it is nonetheless pointless to predicate correctness upon them; what can be considered correct is the decision to carry out the action in order to accomplish its consequences. Another difference that Lewis points out is related to the fact that when there is a decision to make, whereas the *good* solicits and is desired, the *right* commands and is imperative; furthermore, it asks for deliberation and justification (LEWIS, 1969, p. 106). In this sense, Lewis shows that judgements of rightness are specifically normative. Considering this characterization, the pragmatist asserts that:

The problem which delimits the field of ethics is not that of the empirically good or valuable but that of the right and morally imperative. To be sure, there is essential connection between rightness of action and goodness in that which this action is intended to effect. At least, it is with this general conception that rightness of action derives from value in the end, with which we should agree. But just at this point we should be careful that we do not illicitly connect the right and the good, before ever we have distinguished them. (LEWIS, 1946, p. 552).

It is important to highlight that Lewis introduces this analytical distinction between the good and the correct explicitly acknowledging that it entails a distance from the rest of the pragmatists. In “Pragmatism and the roots of the moral” (LEWIS, [1956] 1969, p. 103-125) he points directly to William James exposing that he confuses “good” with “right” (Lewis, 1969, 106), a distinction that John Dewey seems to have omitted as well (LEWIS, 1970, p. 76). In this sense, I agree with Browning and White when they affirm that Lewis takes a step forward by rightly distinguishing questions of ethics from questions of fact about values (BROWNING, 1949, p. 95-96; WHITE, 1949, 58:321), but I must dissent from their view when they also suggest that, by doing so, Lewis’ proposal constitutes a departure from pragmatism and, furthermore, a failure. In White’s words:



Evidently pragmatism is united on the subject of values but not on obligation and justice. Dewey, in spite of a valiant attempt, has not given a naturalistic account of obligation, and Lewis forsakes the task as impossible. We may say, therefore, that pragmatism is without a solution of the fundamental problem of ethics (WHITE, 1949, 58:329).

As far as Browning is concerned, Lewis' distinction between the right and the good, though accurate, represents a heresy to pragmatism and an association with transcendentalism, all of which make his position unsuccessful, such as Dewey's.

To the dominant group of pragmatists this departure [Lewis'] no doubt appears as a dangerous innovation, perhaps as a regrettable loss of faith in, or even a treasonable break with, the program of progressive scientific empiricism. Despite the author's reiterated disclaimers of any truck with transcendentalism, it may be felt that he has unplugged an old leak in the dike. (BROWNING, 1949, p. 95).

Considering this, I will move on to contest this view and show that Lewis' proposal represents no heresy, even less so a transcendentalist perspective. In addition, I will argue that it is a hasty conclusion to consider his proposal a failure.

#### **4 Lewis' "heretical" pragmatism**

In "Practical and Moral Imperatives" (1949), Lewis himself accommodates these critiques but nevertheless explains that, even though he maintains some distance from certain aspects of pragmatism,

[...] at least I take as my point of departure a thesis which is fundamental for pragmatism at large: the thesis namely, that there can be no final separation of knowing from doing, of theoretical from practical, of cognitive aims from the ends of action. Thinking is itself a way of acting, and is indeed that manner of acting which is peculiarly human. Furthermore, it constitutes the possibility of that deliberateness in acting by reason of which human behavior may be self-critical and responsible. (LEWIS, 1969, p. 127).

Having stated this, the philosopher argues that accepting that thinking does have its principles of rightness (logical imperatives) and, at the same time, refusing to recognize that there are *valid* principles which determine the correct mode of action (ethical imperatives), represents a position that pragmatism as a whole would reject from the start, since for pragmatism there is no separation between knowledge and action: without action, knowledge is useless and pointless; and without knowledge, action is blind; in fact, it is quite impossible. Knowledge is itself a mode of action and is also a normative category: what is established as true is what ought to be believed and, if we deliberately and rationally decide it so, it is what ought to be acted on

(LEWIS, 1946, p. 371-2; 1969, p. 128, and ff.). Thus, normativity permeates the whole of our experience, though in different degrees. This leads to conclude that rejecting the validity of normative principles for action implies rejecting the validity of all normative principles that regulate and legitimate the process and results of scientific investigation, a consequence that those who are skeptic with respect to ethics and values are not willing to accept. In this respect, Lewis calls for special attention in considering a new and sophisticated contemporary skepticism in ethics. According to the pragmatist, this contemporary skepticism maintains a cynical attitude towards the ethical, the moral and the valuational validities using the same arguments that Hume brandished towards the validity of knowledge and normativity at large, but curiously omitting to extend them beyond the scope of the validity of science. In his words:

It is a curious and dreadful fact that just at the time when science has put into the hands of men the most powerful instruments for control of their environment—ambivalently capable of use for human betterment or for the suicide of civilization—we should be told, by some of those who celebrate science as the outstanding triumph of the human mind, that appraisals of the good and bad and assessments of the right and wrong have nothing more fundamental as their basis and their sanction than our emotive drives and our subjective persuasions of attitude. (LEWIS, 1969, p. 20).

As the author puts forward, rejecting the rational character of ethics and valuation simultaneously entails rejecting the rational character of knowledge, science and logic. Moreover, it involves denying the rationality of every single mode of action, hence turning the subject into a pervert and fool being. Against this, he reclaims and affirms the rational dimension of values and valuation in human experience showing that, closely related to valuation, founded in our best judgements of values, emerges the normative dimension that makes all human actions and decisions significant. This will be properly developed right below, but I would like to anticipate that what is most interesting is that this articulation between values and norms, between the good and the right, between valuation and normativity, is clearly pragmatic and is embedded in a conception of rationality that is, doubtlessly, pragmatist. In this sense, the interpretations that understand the Lewisian proposal as a departure from pragmatism and, moreover, as one that is in close relation to analytic or transcendentalist positions, fail precisely in omitting the basic premises that give sense to the philosopher's stance, decontextualizing the main thesis of his conceptualist pragmatism. Lewis himself recognizes this and adds that it is exactly this point that the critics have disregarded:

I think my critics must somehow have overlooked this basic thesis of pragmatism. Otherwise they could hardly have been so mystified over the question how a pragmatic theory of knowledge could be made consistent with the recognition of valid imperatives of action. They might better have asked how pragmatism in epistemology could be compatible with anything else (LEWIS, 1969, p. 128).

Lewis' perspective is neither internally inconsistent nor constitutes a heresy to pragmatism. On the contrary, it helps to clarify and understand how a naturalistic theory of value can be articulated with a universalistic theory of normativity within a pragmatist framework of rationality, thus reconfiguring the way philosophy has traditionally conceived the relations between valuation, normativity and rationality. I will develop these points in the section below.

## **5 Revisiting Lewis' conceptualist pragmatism**

In Lewis' perspective the idea of the *desirable/ought to be desired* is not logically derived from the idea of the *desired*. There is no such *logical* entailment, therefore, the naturalistic fallacy does not take place. But there is, as I said before, an essential connection between them: the right emerges from the good (LEWIS, 1946, p. 552, 1957, p. 78-79). In this sense, valuation is the necessary and preceding condition of normativity. The overall question of the foundation of the right rests in a naturalistic theory of value which is conceived as a type of empirical knowledge that, by definition, is justified; that is, is rationally accepted (LEWIS, 1946, p. 407).

The crucial point that is introduced by Lewis' conceptualist pragmatism is that, eventually, these valid judgements of value can start working as normative judgements (ethical, logical, epistemological) if we pragmatically decide it so. Thus, this kind of statements become analytical in the sense that they define what we mean by the right mode of thinking, acting or believing; they become *a priori*, operating previously and independently of particular experiences (but not of *every experience*), and determining our action according to the rational mode. And this conversion responds to pragmatic criteria. When this is the case, we are faced with rational imperatives, which are nothing but our best value judgments formalized as normative judgments. In other words, the normative character emerges, not from a rational intuition of an absolute axiology, but from a pragmatic decision to guide our action according to what we rationally consider is the most intelligent advice, the best counsel for action, in brief, the rationally correct mode of behavior in order to accomplish certain goals.

If, then, I look to a pragmatic basis of the normative, it is to a pragmatism which turns upon the right, and only indirectly upon the good. And perhaps it comes as near to what is pragmatic in Kant and what Royce called his 'absolute pragmatism' as it does to James or Dewey -or even Peirce (LEWIS, 1969, p. 107).

This is why for Lewis a purely empirical analysis of the ethical, the right or the normative is impossible, since it *also* requires the analysis of what we intentionally mean by the *right*. Again, imperative or normative judgements are analytical in the sense that they formally express the criteria and the nature of the right. Thus, according to Lewis, an adequate theory of obligation must be directed to experience *as well as* to the concepts and principles that contain and express the nature and definition of the right, and indirectly, of the good; in other words, it requires a naturalistic explanation of values and the modes of valuations, on the one hand, and a conceptual analysis of the pragmatic *apriorism* that guide our modes of behavior,

on the other. In this sense, I agree together with E. B. Dayton when he affirms that “[...] Lewis’ imperatives provide only the form within which empirical valuing are applied to decisions, so what is morally right is in the final analysis a matter of (both logic and) human nature.” (DAYTON, 1975, p. 301).

## 5 Conclusion

I have discussed White’s criticisms of Lewis’ conception of value and normative judgements and argued that those criticisms were based on a number of misinterpretations of some of the pragmatist’s ideas. I have shown that White’s misunderstanding of Lewis’ theory of knowledge mystified certain pragmatic re-significations concerning the analytic-synthetic distinction, on the one hand, and overlooked the central role that the pragmatic *a priori* plays in Lewis developments, on the other. I believe this may have conducted White to state that Lewis fails in giving an accurate and consistent naturalistic explanation of obligation.

To account for this position, I have attempted to demonstrate that Lewis’ analytical distinction between the good and the right does not conflict with his theory of knowledge, since normative judgements are not analytical in the sense of analyticity that is implied in Quine’s dismantling of the analytic-synthetic distinction. On the contrary, normative judgements are propositions of value that do have empirical content but that function *a priori*, as analytical or defining of the correct mode of action. In this sense, Lewis’ ethical developments do not conflict with his theory of knowledge; quite the opposite, his epistemology highlights his normative developments revealing a naturalistic theory of valuation that is the basis upon which normativity pragmatically emerges.

I have argued, as well, that Lewis’ proposal is built upon a set of theses that are basically pragmatist: the idea that values are facts and that value judgements are propositions that can be justified and empirically determined; a conception of valuation as a pervasive dimension of experience; the rejection of the drastic separation between knowledge and action; the recognition of rationality for ethics and valuation, among others. Lewis himself acknowledges that his developments concerning valuation and ethics are rooted in theses which are fundamental for pragmatism at large (LEWIS, 1969, p. 127), and that having overlooked those fundamental premises was what misled his critics (particularly White) to affirm an inconsistency between a pragmatist theory of knowledge and a theory of value and obligation.

Finally, these conclusions lay support to the thesis that Lewis indeed presents an interesting and promising conception of normativity that is embedded in a naturalistic theory of valuation that can account for the cognitive character of values and norms, without having to give up universalistic pretensions; an original pragmatist position that faces ethical skepticism reclaiming the role, significance and validity of values and norms, showing that rejecting the rational character of ethics and valuation simultaneously entails rejecting the rational character of every mode of action, including knowledge, science and logic. This justifies and demands further research focused on the hypothesis that Lewis’ theory of valuation and normativity has the potential to account for the main issues concerning the recent debates regarding the relation between norms and values, namely: the conception and epistemic status of values and norms; the validity conditions of scientific, value

and normative judgments; the incidence of disagreement and value pluralism in the cognitive status of values and in the universality of norms; and the definition and applicability of the conception of rationality, among others (PUTNAM et al., 2008); all of the issues which, on the other hand, stem from certain assumptions that, according to Joseph Margolis, still remain insufficiently explained within pragmatism: “[...] the correct account of the relationship between naturalism and pragmatism [...] [and] the conceptual relationship between the distinctive rigor of ‘reason’ (or ‘thought’) and the continuum of “experience”” (MARGOLIS, 2013, p. 108). I hypothesize that Lewis can offer a serious and fruitful response to these questions; one that can also overcome the limitations of a reductionist naturalism (in both metaphysical and methodological terms), on the one hand, and avoid the risks of a dichotomization between values and norms, on the other; both consequences that could lead to a loss of rationality regarding the value and normative fields and discourses.

## **References**

- BROWNING, Robert W. On Professor Lewis' distinction between ethics and valuation. In: *Ethics*. v. 59, n. 2, p. 95-111. 1949.
- CALCATERRA, Rosa. Categorical Ways of Acting. Remarks on C. I. Lewis' Amendment of Kantian a priori. In: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*. v. VII, n. 1, 2009.
- DAYTON, Eric B. Reason and desire in C. I. Lewis. In: *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. v. 11, n. 4, p. 289-304. 1975.
- DEWEY, John. *The Later Works, 1925-1953*. Edited by Jo Ann Boydston. v. 17. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1990.
- GOUINLOCK, James. Dewey's theory of moral deliberation. In: *Ethics*. v. 88, n. 3, 1978.
- HENEY, Diana B. *Toward a pragmatist metaethics*. London and New York: Routledge. 2016.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. A pragmatic conception of the a priori. In: *The Journal of Philosophy*. v. 20, n. 7, p. 169-77, 1923.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. *Mind and the world-order*. New York: Dover Publications. 1929.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. *An analysis of knowledge and valuation*. La Salle: The Open Court Pub. Co. 1946.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. *The ground and nature of the right*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1955.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. *Our social inheritance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1957.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. *Values and imperatives: studies in ethics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1969.
- LEWIS, Clarence I. *Collected papers*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1970.

MARGOLIS, Joseph. Some remarks on Cheryl Misak's the American pragmatists. In: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*. v. V, n. 2, p. 106-112. 2013.

MISAK, Cheryl J. *The American Pragmatists*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. 2013.

MURPHEY, Murray G. *C. I. Lewis: the last great pragmatist*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2005.

PUTNAM, Hilary; HABERMAS Jürgen; VEGA ENCABO Jesús; and GIL MARTÍN Francisco J. *Normas y valores*. Madrid: Trotta. 2008.

QUINE, W. V. *Two dogmas of empiricism*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1951.

ROBIN, Richard S. Lewis, Peirce, and the complexity of Classical Pragmatism. In: *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. v. 42, n. 1, 2006.

ROSENTHAL, Sandra B. The pragmatic a priori: Lewis and Dewey. In: *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. v. XXV, n. 1, 1987.

ROSENTHAL, Sandra B. *C. I. Lewis in focus: the pulse of pragmatism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2007.

SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, Victoria P. El pragmatismo conceptualista de C.I. Lewis: una revisión crítica. Ciudad Universitaria: UNAM. 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_. Análisis crítico del pragmatismo conceptualista de C I. Lewis. Aportes a la epistemología reciente. Tesis de posgrado. Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación. En Memoria Académica. 2015b. Disponible en: <http://www.memoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/tesis/te.1084/te.1084.pdf>

\_\_\_\_\_. Valoración y normatividad desde un enfoque pragmatista conceptualista. In: Conocimiento, arte y valoración: perspectivas filosóficas actuales. SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, Victoria Paz; LÓPEZ, Federico E., BUSDYGAN, Daniel (Eds.). Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2016. p. 44-53.

SCHLESINGER, Arthur M; and WHITE, Morton. *Paths of American thought*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1963.

SINCLAIR, Robert. Quine and Conceptual Pragmatism. In: *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. v. 48, n. 3, p. 335-355, 2012.

\_\_\_\_\_. Dewey and White on value, obligation, and practical judgment. In: *De Gruyter*. v. 15, n. 1, p. 39-54, 2014.

WHITE, Morton. Value and obligation in Dewey and Lewis. In: *The Philosophical Review*. v. 58, n. 4, 1949.

\_\_\_\_\_. Desire and desirability: a rejoinder to a posthumous reply by John Dewey. In: *Journal of Philosophy*. v. 93, n. 5, p. 229-242, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. Peirce's summum bonum and the ethical views of C. I. Lewis and John Dewey. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. v. 59, n. 4, p. 1029-37. 1999.

Data de envio: 02-12-17

Data de aprovação: 18-12-17