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Revisiting political pragmatism and education: Rawls, Dewey, Bernstein

Revisitando o pragmatismo político e a educação: Rawls, Dewey, Bernstein

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Abstract: By placing John Dewey between John Rawls and Richard Bernstein, I argue for a socialist reading of Dewey's takes on liberal democracy that moves away both from conservative readings of Dewey of those who claim that his democratic liberalism actually belongs to right-wing or center views, and from left-wing, communitarians who dismiss such views as irrelevant for socialist and radical variants of liberal democracy. Overall, it can be shown that Rawls and Dewey's different takes on political liberalism could be ultimately reconciled, given their similar takes on democracy, pluralism, and the person. Rawls' rehabilitation of Kant can itself be shown to be closely related to his reading of Dewey. Furthermore, as Bernstein argues, such a renewal of Dewey's social and political philosophy in Rawls's political constructivism and reflective equilibrium was decisive for the great pragmatist turn observed in the second, third, and fourth generations of critical theory, not only in the so-called Frankfurt School (especially Habermas, Honneth, Forst) but also in feminist and decolonial thinkers such as Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Rahel Jaeggi, and Amy Allen. Dewey's pragmatist turn in political philosophy allows thus for a dynamic, robust correlation between radical democracy and public education, which could be implemented in emerging democracies like Brazil.

Keywords: Critical theory. Education. Liberalism. Political philosophy. Pragmatism.

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Resumo: *Ao colocar John Dewey entre John Rawls e Richard Bernstein, defendo uma leitura socialista das posições de Dewey sobre a democracia liberal que se afasta tanto das leituras conservadoras de Dewey como daqueles que afirmam que o seu liberalismo democrático na verdade pertence a uma visão de direita ou de centro, e de comunitaristas de esquerda que rejeitam tais pontos de vista como irrelevantes para as variantes socialistas e radicais da democracia liberal. De uma maneira geral, pode-se demonstrar que as diferentes opiniões de Rawls e Dewey sobre o liberalismo político poderiam ser, em última análise, reconciliadas, dadas as suas posições semelhantes sobre a democracia, o pluralismo e a pessoa humana. Pode-se ainda demonstrar que a própria reabilitação de Kant por Rawls está intimamente relacionada à sua leitura de Dewey. Além disso, como argumenta Bernstein, tal renovação da filosofia social e política de Dewey no construtivismo político e no equilíbrio reflexivo de Rawls foi decisiva para a grande guinada pragmatista observada na segunda, terceira e quarta gerações da teoria crítica, não apenas na chamada Escola de Frankfurt (especialmente Habermas, Honneth, Forst), mas também em pensadoras feministas e decoloniais como Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Rahel Jaeggi e Amy Allen. A reviravolta pragmática de Dewey na filosofia política permite, assim, uma correlação dinâmica e robusta entre a democracia radical e a educação pública, que poderia ser implementada em democracias emergentes como o Brasil.*



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Palavras-chave: Educação. Filosofia política. Liberalismo. Pragmatismo. Teoria crítica.

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1 Introduction

In order to place John Dewey between John Rawls and Richard Bernstein, I must evoke two rather long quotes from these great representatives of American pragmatism and critical interpreters of Dewey's political philosophy. The first one is found in John Rawls's (1999, p. 303) *Collected Papers*:

We tend to think of Dewey as the founder of a characteristically American and instrumental naturalism and, thus, to lose sight of the fact that Dewey started his philosophical life, as many did in the late nineteenth century, greatly influenced by Hegel; and his genius was to adapt much that is valuable in Hegel's idealism to a form of naturalism congenial to our culture. It was one of Hegel's aims to overcome the many dualisms which he thought disfigured Kant's transcendental idealism, and Dewey shared this emphasis throughout his work, often stressing the continuity between things that Kant had sharply separated. This theme is present particularly in Dewey's early writings, where the historical origins of his thought are more in evidence. In elaborating his moral theory along somewhat Hegelian lines, Dewey opposes Kant, sometimes quite explicitly, and often at the same places at which justice as fairness also departs from Kant. Thus, there are a number of affinities between justice as fairness and Dewey's moral theory, which are explained by the common aim of overcoming the dualisms in Kant's doctrine.

The second quote comes from Richard J. Bernstein's (1971, p. 80) first major publication, *Praxis and Action*:

Although Peirce was almost totally indifferent to the concrete problems of social and political philosophy, Dewey considered these to be central to a reconstructed philosophy. Paradoxically, Dewey -of all the [pragmatist] thinkers considered- is the closest and furthest away from Marx. *Au fond*, Dewey was a reformer. He was deeply skeptical of the demand for revolution, as understood by Marx. Dewey's advocacy of liberal amelioration would have been seen as the greatest threat to genuine revolutionary praxis, and I have no doubt that Marx would have attacked Dewey in the same ruthless manner in which he attacked all "true socialists".

From the outset, let me announce my guiding idea in this paper: by placing Dewey between Rawls and Bernstein, I will seek to make sense of a socialist reading of Dewey's takes on liberal democracy that moves away both from conservative readings of Dewey that claim that his democratic liberalism actually belongs to a right-wing or center views, and from left-wing, communitarians who dismiss such views as irrelevant for socialist and radical variants of liberal democracy. Overall, it can be shown that, as Celik (2019) has convincingly argued, Rawls and Dewey's different takes on political liberalism could be ultimately reconciled, given their similar takes on democracy, pluralism, and the acting person *qua* political agent. Rawls' rehabilitation of Kant can itself be shown to be closely related to his reading of Dewey. Furthermore, as Bernstein argues, such a renewal of Dewey's social and political philosophy in Rawls's political constructivism and reflective equilibrium was decisive for the great pragmatist turn observed in the second, third, and fourth generations of critical theory, not only in the so-called Frankfurt School (especially Habermas, Honneth, Forst) but also in feminist and decolonial thinkers such as Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Rahel Jaeggi, and Amy Allen. Fraser (1995, p. 167) has convincingly shown that feminism has helped critical theory make sense of its own linguistic turn as a pragmatist turn, filling in the so-called phenomenological deficit of social criticism: "social phenomena contain an irreducible signifying dimension and cannot be understood objectivistically." Benhabib (1987) has systematically elaborated on critical-theoretical feminist takes on selfhood in a close interlocution with both analytical and continental traditions very much akin to Bernstein's recasting

of pragmatism, avoiding both liberal individualism and communitarian totalitarianism. Furthermore, as Richard Rorty (1982), James Campbell (1996), David Dilworth (2003), and Richard Bernstein (2010) have all independently shown, Dewey's political pragmatism avoids assuming a single identity of philosophical affiliation (such as political realism, liberalism or communitarianism) at the same time that it allows for various of the most significant aspects of each strand to coexist in critical theory and political theory, including the articulation of phenomenology and hermeneutics well beyond the so-called analytical-continental divide in contemporary philosophy.

2 Reconstruction, constructivism, egalitarianism

It is fascinating to realize that Dewey (1930; 1950) spoke and wrote about both “construction” and “reconstruction” in political philosophy many decades before Rawls and Habermas (1979) – although there are now hundreds of studies and publications on their respective conceptions of political constructivism and normative reconstruction, almost all of them fail to realize this. But both Rawls and Habermas do resort to a Deweyan, post-Hegelian reading of Kant that provides us with critical, theoretical grounds for a sustainable approach to the political pedagogy and philosophy of education that address the normative claims and challenges of the conflicting democracies we live in, especially in Brazil where one of Dewey's most outspoken heralds has been systematically dismissed as a Marxist, pamphletary radical – I am of course thinking of Paulo Freire, whose highly original work is much more appreciated in the Northern hemisphere than it is in our *tristes tropiques*. In effect, I firmly believe that Freire's and Rawls's practical-theoretical articulation between “democracy and education” do justice to Dewey's holistic conception of experience so well outlined by Bernstein. Furthermore, I think that Dewey's attempt to revisit Kant's (1777) idea of education as a vital need for the development of humanity, its social and cultural function, through its articulation with the implementation of democracy and normative integration of society, ends up with a conception of philosophy of education that might be capable of establishing the fair correlation between democracy and education that Rawls, Bernstein, and Freire sought to promote. It has been a working hypothesis for my ongoing research program to assert that there is no social justice without democracy, just as one cannot implement democracy without education, and we should thank Dewey for having established such a correlation *in der Praxis*.

As we all know too well, one of the central problems of Western philosophy is the articulation between theory (*theoria*) and practice (*praxis*), particularly in ethics and political philosophy, and John Dewey's takes on the experience of democracy and its endless learning processes do address this classic problem, unpacking the interfaces of philosophy with society. In particular, Dewey might help us today focus mainly on the articulation between a theory of democracy and a comprehensive project of education as we find it as a normative challenge for our democracies, as we keep revisiting the most basic beliefs, practices, and values shared by our existing democracies. His lasting contribution to pragmatism and to the emergence of a pedagogical theory of democracy takes place, after all, within what he dubbed the reconstruction of classical conceptions of the Enlightenment and of German idealism, notably Kant and Hegel, reappropriated in a New World context. Dewey's pedagogical project doesn't just focus on philosophical problems of theory and practice, but furnishes out social *ethos* with elements and clues to making sense of public policies aimed above all at the implementation of a robust, radical democracy. The construction of a democratic *ethos* is to be worked out bottom-up through the constant learning among fellow citizens, who end up consolidating an egalitarianism not only of legal standing (i.e., that all citizens are equal before the law) but also of gender, race, religious, and socioeconomic strands that contribute to diversity. In effect, Dewey's political-pedagogical legacy was decisive for the emergence of a correlated theory of justice such as Rawls's in the second half of the 20th century and subsequent critical-theoretical variants thereof. Besides his later writings on *Political Liberalism* after the oft-quoted

Dewey Lectures on Kantian constructivism at Columbia University, Rawls mentions Dewey twice in his masterpiece:

1. *A Theory of Justice* § 61 p. 351 n. 2: where Rawls (1971, p. 351) mentions the so-called “naturalists in value theory” and alludes to John Dewey (2007), *Human Nature and Conduct* (originally published in 1922), pt. III.
2. In the second note, n. 10 on p. 358 in § 63, as Rawls (1971, p. 358) discusses the definition of good for plans of life (“a thing’s being a good X for K is treated as equivalent to its having the properties which it is rational for K to want in an X in view of her interests and aims”), he remarks that this is the typical philosophical usage of the term to concede, with Josiah Royce, that “the rational plan for a person determines her good” and Rawls refers us back to § 61, note 2, and mentions Dewey again. In Rawls’s own words, “the term is given no technical sense, nor are the structures of plans invoked to get other than obvious common sense results. These are matters I do not investigate.” And he concludes that “the notion of a plan may prove useful in characterizing intentional action”.

It seems very important to evoke at this point Derek Parfit’s (2002) distinction between a “telic” and a “deontic” egalitarian view so as to capture important aspects of these different ways of thinking about social justice and how Rawls’s reading of Dewey takes both into account on the very level of individuals’ plans of life and plans of action without succumbing to either a purely Kantian, formal deontology or a Hegelian, historicist teleology. To my mind, it is right here that we can identify a very important point to make sense of a pragmatist conception of political liberalism.

Unlike Parfit and Jerry Cohen (2008), Rawls’s conception of justice, egalitarianism, and his rather misunderstood argumentative construction of public justification is fact-sensitive, meaning that, like Dewey, Rawls starts from the circumstances of justice without taking social, normative facts for granted and setting out to construct a procedure capable of establishing a connection between the first principles of justice and the conception of moral persons as free and equal. This is precisely what Rawls calls “Kantian constructivism” in the three John Dewey lectures that he presented at Columbia University in April, 1980, on “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory”, namely: the first, “Rational and Full Autonomy”, on April 14; the second, “Representation of Freedom and Equality”, on April 15; and the third, “Construction and Objectivity”, on April 16.¹

Rawls begins his first lecture by pointing out, as we mentioned in the epigraph above, that Dewey followed Hegel’s aims to overcome the many dualisms that disfigured Kant’s transcendental idealism. On Rawls’s reading of Dewey, this theme of overcoming Kantian dualisms turns out to be present in the latter’s early writings, where the historical origins of his thought are more in evidence:

In elaborating his moral theory along somewhat Hegelian lines, Dewey opposes Kant, sometimes quite explicitly, and often at the same places at which justice as fairness also departs from Kant. Thus, there are a number of affinities between justice as fairness and Dewey’s moral theory, which are explained by the common aim of overcoming the dualisms in Kant’s doctrine. (Rawls, 1999, 330).

And Rawls (1999, p. 331 n. 2) goes on to recast Kantian constructivism not only in moral, normative terms (especially around the idea of the categorical imperative as a universalizable procedure) but especially as a political constructivism. He mentions several writings by Dewey, among which the

¹ These constitute the fourth series of such Lectures and were established in 1967 to honor Dewey, who had been from 1905 to 1930 a professor of philosophy at Columbia University in NYC. The lectures were originally published in the *Journal of Philosophy* (vol. 77 September 1980, p. 515-572) and were reprinted in his *Collected Papers*, edited by Samuel Freeman (Rawls, 1999, p. 330-358).

latter's *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891) and *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* (1894), both reprinted in Dewey (1971). In a nutshell, for Rawls, these egalitarian principles (Equal Liberty, including the distribution of rights and liberties, Fair Equality of Opportunity, and the Difference Principle) can be evoked to articulate the liberal idea of freedom with republican takes on equality for modern democratic societies. (Anderson, 1999) All we need is a procedure of construction in which rationally autonomous agents are represented as reasonable public persons acting and leading their daily lives in agreement with public principles of justice. Accordingly, Rawls (1971, p. 130) thought that it would be a gross mistake, as he found in Henry Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* (1874), to regard the categorical imperative as a purely formal principle, or what he called "the principle of equity" ("whatever is right for one person is right for all similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances"), as Sidgwick reduced the traditional moral conceptions to three major methods: rational egoism, (pluralistic) intuitionism, and classical utilitarianism. Rawls claims that his own view of justice is constructivist, meaning that he appeals to some general claims about the nature of persons as well as some empirical facts about human behavior or institutions as part of the justification for the principles of justice (or the choice situation that leads us to pick them).

Now, it is well known that *A Theory of Justice* also introduced the Rawlsian metaphors of natural lottery and social lottery in order to recast liberal, relational egalitarianism as an alternative account to luck egalitarianism and lottery-esque versions thereof. At any rate, Rawls (1971, p. 15) clearly sought after a "conception of justice that nullifies the accidents of natural endowment and the contingencies of social circumstance as counters in quest for social and economic advantage," as these aspects are "arbitrary from a moral point of view". Rawls's critique of so-called luck egalitarianism unveils the kernel of lottery-esque or lottery schemes in the articulation of fair equality of economic opportunities with the guarantee of a just distribution of social goods throughout generations. The very conception of social equality and social freedom turns out to ground the liberation narratives that sought to counter political authoritarianism in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s, making thus possible a rapprochement between justice and liberation, just as Dewey and Freire had anticipated. Hence, decolonizing justice and liberation means precisely to rescue the heterogeneous ways that different local histories and embodied practices of social freedom and egalitarianism avoid totalizing claims of normativity so as to include also ongoing struggles for recognition in race and gender egalitarianism. Besides the misleading and controversial readings of Rawlsian egalitarianism, through a wide spectrum ranging from lucky egalitarians to paternalistic readings of accountability, including the leftist and the rather conservative readings of political liberalism, I argue that we must resort to a wide reflective equilibrium so as to calibrate our local practices of liberation (nonideal theory) with the normative claims of justice as fairness (ideal theory).

3 Dewey's democracy-education correlation

In his response to the argument that the Deweyan notion of democracy is incompatible with Rawls's concept of reasonable pluralism, Rogers (2009) argues that for Dewey plurality is invaluable in realizing a democratic society. Richard Bernstein draws a very thought-provoking and insightful parallel between Dewey's criticism of intuitionism and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in their radical critique of the given (to reason or rational intuition), a similar critique that is also found in Rawls's constructivism, itself conceived as an alternative to intuitionism, perfectionism, and utilitarianism.

According to Bernstein (1966, p. xi), from a Marxist point of view, Dewey's reformist liberalism "fails to appreciate the extent to which conditions of political economy as they now exist in advanced capitalist societies" (including the state capitalism of many so-called Communist countries) continues to perpetuate the alienation and exploitation of man. Bernstein recalls that in this striking book, first

published right after the First World War, Dewey (1950, p. 40) considers how, why, and when human affairs should prompt a new approach to concepts of morality and justice: “How should the revelations of science in the 20th century, and its consequential technology, impact human thought? Is seeing knowledge as power philosophically supportable and desirable? Must we redefine what it means to be an idealist? Where do politics and philosophy intersect?” Bernstein concludes that Dewey’s bracing explorations of these questions continue to enthrall thinking people and remain vitally relevant nearly a century after they were written. Bernstein (1971, p. 173) has delved into Dewey’s understanding of experience as a series of organic coordination, including human cognitive functions and his typical philosophical approach to problems in which he attempted to show how conflicting viewpoints could be reconciled and synthesized, clearly influenced by Hegel.

But just as Marx grew restless with Hegel and especially his dominant emphasis on intellectual comprehension, so also did Dewey, as he came to feel an increasing conviction that Hegel had underplayed and misunderstood the practical aspects of life and what it meant to be an active human being shaping the world. Just like the Young Hegelians in Germany, Dewey also sought to go beyond Hegel, and it was in the realm of practice that Hegelianism clearly demanded a correction. For Dewey, the primary intellectual project became the attempt to change the world, although this had a very different meaning for him than it did for Marx. As William James and John Dewey have taught us, many of our deepest intellectual questions are rooted in our personal and communal conflicts and struggles. It was this animating concern with praxis that gradually led me to the realization that “there was a way reading of Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytic philosophy as gravitating toward new understandings of praxis and action”. (Bernstein, 1971, p. 200)

It is with this pragmatic intent that one may revisit three brief proposals from Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, originally published in 1916, and which remains one of the most influential writings for the 20th-century philosophy of education, as I believe that for emerging democracies like Brazil, this text remains a landmark to radically transform our society by implementing more efficient educational public policies. The book is divided into 26 sections, starting with reflections on education as a vital need, its social and cultural function, through its articulation with the implementation of democracy, and ending with three dedicated chapters to the philosophy of education, theories of knowledge, and theories of morality.

Along with Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, Dewey is considered one of the major founders of American pragmatism. Dewey helped develop the University of Chicago’s curriculum, where he served as a professor between 1894 and 1904. Together with economists Thorstein Veblen and James Harvey Robinson, Dewey was one of the founders of the New School for Social Research in New York in 1919, when he was a professor of philosophy at Columbia University. His starting point, in his life and in his works, is as crystal-clear as his pragmatism: if education is indeed vital for the consolidation of humanity in its fullness and if democracy is the best way to realize such fullness, as soon as the promotion of education will make a social ethos feasible then an increasing number of people will have access to the necessary means to accomplish such purposes. In Rawlsian terms, it is a matter of having a plan of life for the social *ethos*: democracy comes about through education, as education alone (in a broad and public sense) inevitably leads to the realization of a palpable form of democratic governance. Dewey develops thus from this several of the premises already posited by the pedagogical writings of Plato and Rousseau, avoiding possible reductionisms to the communitarianism of the former and to the individualism of the latter. Indeed, the entire development of the history of Western political philosophy, from the times of the sophists, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, was guided by the articulation between an ideal of education (*paideia*) and the project of conceiving what would be the best form of constitution (*politeia*) for the ancient city-state (*polis*). As Reinholdo Ullmann (2000) showed in his meticulous study of Medieval universities and learning institutions, the flourishing of academia promoting the studies of arts and sciences from the 12th century in Europe is inseparable from

the millenary legacy of the great philosophical schools and their multiple chains. Hence, we could not understand the challenges of integrating education elementary and high school with university education and the culture of research that is developed at the graduate level, without paying attention to a historical-social articulation between the emergence of cultural modernity (Renaissance humanism, the reform, and the counter-reform, the great navigations, the birth of modern science) and of the great natural law and contractarian liberals in the 17th and 18th centuries (by Althusius, Grotius and Hobbes, by Locke, Rousseau and Kant). The question of humanism (including the quarrels of the call anti-humanism of structuralists and postmoderns) unveils the problem of a non-foundational justification, in terms of the pragmatism proposed by Dewey, who brings it closer to the usefulness of certain concepts for life, such as communication, practice, context and the development of human action aiming for continuous learning that could not be confined to one system or to a totalizing theory.

4 Dewey's pedagogy of experience

According to Dewey, every thought, like every educational project, is embedded in a sociopolitical context. Thus, the works of contemporary authors as diverse as Paulo Freire, John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Noam Chomsky, Hans Jonas, and Richard Bernstein were, of course, influenced by the contributions of a thinker like Dewey (Green, 2014), who never ceased to engage in a socioeconomic context of great turmoil, marked above all the Great Depression of 1929 and the Second World War (1939-1945).

Bernstein (1971, p. 202) introduces Dewey's *Experience and Nature* by invoking the claim that "experience is a weasel". He highlights the centrality of the concept of experience in the history of Western philosophy, emphasizing that every major philosophical position has addressed the question of what experience truly is. Despite this, Dewey argues for the indispensability of the concept and endeavors to formulate a new theory of experience suitable for the contemporary era.

In "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy", Dewey presents five contrasts between his view of experience and the "orthodox" or "traditional" perspective. Bernstein elucidates each contrast, revealing Dewey's distinctive understanding of experience. Firstly, Dewey rejects the notion that experience is primarily a knowledge affair, emphasizing its dynamic interaction with the physical and social environment. In contrast to the historical focus on the past, Dewey advocates for an experimental and forward-reaching concept of experience. Dewey challenges the traditional subjectivity associated with experience, attributing it to the "subjectivistic turn" initiated by Descartes. He critiques the narrow view that ties experience to what has been given in the past, arguing for an understanding of experience that involves projection and connection with the future. Dewey also disputes the empirical tradition's commitment to particularism, asserting that genuine experience is rich with connections and continuities. Contrary to the traditional dichotomy between experience and thought, Dewey contends that experience is inherently inferential. He rejects the limitation of experience to sensory perception and memory, asserting that it involves intelligent activity and controlled inference. Additionally, Dewey extends his exploration of experience to his educational and social philosophy, emphasizing the aesthetic consummatory dimension often overlooked in institutional practices.

Bernstein aligns thus Dewey's stance on liberalism with a rejection of a narrow interpretation centered on individual rights. Dewey's radical liberalism, according to Bernstein, encompasses a revitalization of local communal life, challenging the prevailing perception of liberalism as a defense of the *status quo*. Dewey's vision of "creative democracy" emphasizes the importance of multiple local democratic communities for a flourishing liberal democratic society. Finally, Bernstein proceeds to recast the discussion of the contemporary socio-political context, touching on issues of inequality, corruption, and the imperative for education. Bernstein highlights the need for a robust defense of dynamic, committed

liberalism, echoing Dewey's vision, which emphasizes the interplay between individual flourishing and societal progress.

As Bernstein argues, "experience" in many of its characteristic philosophic uses has been used as a contrast term with "thought", "inference", or "reason." Underlying this use is a fundamental epistemological doctrine that experience is limited to what is sensed, perceived, or remembered. Experience supplies the input and reason is the faculty or capacity by which we order, arrange, and draw inferences from this input. As Bernstein points out, Dewey (1960) challenges a dogma that has infected traditional philosophy. Experience can be nonrational and irrational, but it can also be funded with intelligence and controlled inference.

Hence, the proper contrast, according to Dewey, is not between experience and reason, but between experience which is founded by the procedures and results of intelligent activity and experience which is not. (Bernstein, 1971, p. 212) In Dewey's educational and social philosophy, he also emphasizes the aesthetic consummatory dimension of experience. He criticizes educational and social institutions and practices for neglecting this aesthetic dimension of experience. This is evidenced in the separation of means and ends in our educational and social thinking. The quality and content of the ends-in-view that we strive to attain depend upon the quality of the means that we use to attain them. (Bernstein, 1971, p. 216) Traditionally, theory has been contrasted with practice, and theoretical judgments have been sharply distinguished from practical judgments. To the extent that these two types of judgment have been assimilated, philosophers have written as if practical judgments were a degenerate form of theoretical judgments.

5 Education as a learning process of reconstruction

According to Bernstein, Dewey moves in the opposite direction, as theoretical judgments have been misunderstood precisely because of the failure to appreciate how they share the characteristics of practical judgments that have been outlined above. For Bernstein (1971, p. 222), this remains one of Dewey's most important and most misunderstood claims. He did not mean that theoretical judgments are justified only insofar as they serve some "practical" ends, or that we must always have our sights set on the "practical" uses of knowledge. On the contrary, theoretical inquiry gains its systematic explanatory power in the degree to which it abstracts from the demands of immediate existential situations. Unless we have a disinterested concern with developing theoretical inquiry for its own sake, we cripple the systematic explanatory power of our theories. Speaking of theories as they are used in scientific inquiry, Dewey (1971, p. 140) says that they are "matters of systematic abstraction".

Hence, education ought to be regarded as a continuous learning process of reconstruction in which there is a progressive movement away from the child's immature experience towards an experience that becomes more pregnant with meaning, more systematic, and more controlled. What Dewey means by this must be viewed against the background of this theory of experiential situations and inquiry. Since the goal of education is the development of creative intelligence, we must keep in mind the distinctive meaning that this concept has for Dewey. Intelligence is not to be identified with a narrow concept of reason considered as the ability to make inferences and draw conclusions from explicitly stated premises. Intelligence consists of a complex set of flexible and growing habits that involve sensitivity; the ability to discern the complexities of situations; imagination that is exercised in seeing new possibilities and hypotheses; willingness to learn from experience; fairness and objectivity in judging and evaluating conflicting values and opinions; and the courage to change one's views when it is demanded by the consequences of our actions and the criticisms of others. As Campbell (1996, p. 189) put it so aptly, liberal democracy turns out to be an attempt to apply social intelligence to the process of shared living. Liberalism is committed, as Dewey wrote, "to the use of freed intelligence". And this is the reason why

responsible research in artificial intelligence cannot be pursued without human supervision. (Russell and Norvig, 2022)

After all, education is ultimately to be pursued as moral education, when we understand “moral” in the broad sense which involves intelligent evaluation. Another way of making this point is to say that the function of education is to bring about the effective realization of the experimental spirit in all phases of human life. Education must be concerned with all aspects of the individual’s intellectual and emotional development. The point of the slogan “learn by doing” is that a sound education must encourage and cultivate the active experimental dimension of the child’s experience.

When it comes to the question of radical democracy, Bernstein follows David Woods to claim that Dewey doesn’t wax nostalgic about the eclipsed bonds of shared community life. (Green, 2014, p. 146) On the contrary, he thinks Dewey took the existence of shared community life with great seriousness, as a firm believer in the importance of local communal life being vital for democracy. But Dewey never thought that revitalizing local community life was incompatible with his understanding of radical liberalism: for Bernstein, “there is no either/or here for Dewey, but rather both/and” (Green, 2014, p. 127). More concretely, a vital local community life is essential for a flourishing liberal democratic society. It is precisely this combination of a call for revitalizing multiple local democratic communities with a larger vision of a liberal pluralistic society that is distinctive of Dewey’s vision of “creative democracy”. Concerning liberalism, Bernstein agrees with Koopman in that Dewey has a rich and dynamic sense of what liberalism means (Green, 2014, p. 188). But unfortunately, this is not what many contemporary political theorists and philosophers understand by liberalism. Whether one appeals to John Locke or John Rawls, many liberals (and critics of liberalism) think that liberalism is the political doctrine that is primarily concerned with the articulation and defense of individual rights. This is what Alan Ryan described as a “rights-obsessed liberalism” (Green, 2014, p. 189). So Bernstein agrees with Koopman that Dewey was a liberal – indeed, he called for liberalism to be more radical, but he rejected a narrow interpretation of liberalism that was little more than the defense of the status quo (Green, 2014, p. 127). It is regrettable that in the American political landscape the very term “liberal” has been so debased that no politician wants to be labeled a “liberal”. For Bernstein, what is so desperately needed today in American political life (and throughout the world) is not the abandonment of liberalism but the strongest possible defense of the type of dynamic committed liberalism that Dewey (and Rawls) so eloquently and passionately championed – a liberalism that is not only compatible with, but depends upon, the existence of multiple public spaces in which local democratic communities can flourish. Dewey’s radical liberalism is perfectly compatible with his claim that “unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately solve its most urgent problem to find and identify itself” (Green, 2014, p. 2). But if it is re-established, it will manifest a fullness, variety, and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods unknown in the contiguous associations of the past to a theory of democracy, in authors such as Rawls and Habermas, whose reception in Brazil remains a theoretical framework to be explored.

Let us recall in closing that, in order to make a case for Bernstein’s (2010, p. 30) recasting of Dewey’s radical liberalism, one must keep in mind that “the spirit of critical pragmatic fallibilism represents what is best in the American tradition and has global significance”. This is to be understood not only in epistemological terms but also insofar as moral beliefs and normative claims are concerned: “Fallibilism is the belief that any knowledge claim or, more generally, any validity claim – including moral and political claims – is open to ongoing examination, modification, and critique”. In effect, Bernstein was also, together with Hilary Putnam, one of the first American philosophers to compare pragmatism and other philosophical models that resorted to the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason, especially by comparing Dewey to Kant and Wittgenstein. Thus, on his reading of Wittgenstein, the root of moral criticism must be shared practices (including shared practices of criticism itself) and not some theory of the good. By way of comparison, Dewey also held that one purpose for philosophy should be to criticize the beliefs, customs, policies, and institutions of culture

but only through the others' shared beliefs, customs, policies, and institutions of such culture. Hence, Dewey's *Ethics* and, in particular, the part in which he argues that any progress (social, political, economic etc.) is not possible without human flourishing, without fulfillment of individuals' powers and capacities. For Dewey, a philosophy concerned with political and social reform does not make sense without equal concern for individual human flourishing, a position compatible with Wittgenstein. These things, according to Dewey, are deeply interconnected and in a dialectical relationship: political and social progress occurs through individual flourishing, and, in turn, individuals are the agents of social and political progress.

Bernstein thought that his reading of Dewey's radical democracy could be applied elsewhere, as pragmatism could also flourish in Latin America to help carry out the normative claims of a political culture that resisted authoritarianism and sought alternatives to positivism. (Castillo; Faerna; Hickman, 2015) Brazil was no exception to this emergent landscape of democratization following over two decades of military rule, and remains to this day a failed project of social egalitarianism. The latest data confirming that Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries in the world coincide with the almost routine complaints of corruption, partisan scandals, and irregularities in various parties and political leaders of this country, inseparable from impunity in almost all the segments of a supposedly democratic and law-abiding State. Today, there is, finally, a consensus among politicians, intellectuals, and professionals from our country that education is the greatest challenge capable of revolutionizing the structures of this society that has become colluded with mediocrity, institutional backwardness, and structural inequalities. Hence, fostering democracy is a task that inexorably engages rulers and the ruled in a correlation of complicity, according to the popular adage that the people have the government they deserve. After all, the correlation between duties and rights is fundamental in a democracy in terms of what is presupposed between the State and civil society. As insofar as the vote and public opinion are instruments of legitimization of our social, economic, and political institutions, democratic pedagogy teaches us to be more critical and consequent, not just when we choose certain representatives and we believe in their promises, but also in our daily practices, as they may or may not collaborate for a true democratic egalitarianism (Habermas, 1975).

Today, more than ever, when we are recovering from the greatest economic, political, and pandemic crisis in our winding process of democratization in Brazil, as far-right negationism, obscurantism, and fundamentalism threatened for years public affairs and our social, political, legal, and economic institutions, we must recognize in both public and private spheres, that it is precisely in education that lies our hope for social transformation and the very basis of our unfinished project of democracy. Public policies and every project for social improvement in our country demand more investment in public education to build up a democratic, transparent, and participatory ethos. From literacy projects and the consolidation of teaching quality in public primary and middle schools for every citizen to the management of higher education institutions, research, and technology centers, our idea of education is paramount to determining the construction of a more egalitarian liberal society. Under the sign of the correlation between "democracy and education", we can thus assert that there is no justice without democracy, just as democracy cannot be implemented without education.

6 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, we postulate the reconstruction of an emancipatory pedagogy by the practical-theoretical articulation between, on the one hand, a conception of communicative public reason and instrumental rationality, allowing for a wide reflective equilibrium of liberal socialism that promotes relational egalitarianism through democratic learning processes. The great challenge facing Marxism and its heterodox versions bequeathed us, after all, has been to find theoretical models that are able

to effectively carry out the social transformations necessary to obtain a certain kind of normativity, legally and morally legitimized, avoiding thus, on the one hand, idealist, unrealizable utopias and, on the other hand, the historicism of conformist practices due to the domination of instrumental over communicative actions. Following Rawls's and Habermas's critical appropriation of Kant and Dewey, we can reformulate the articulation between theory and praxis by overcoming the impasse between the technological demands of our globalized world and of a massive, depoliticized population. Hence, the importance of rediscovering the complex dynamics of public reason or even an expanded public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) inherent to the emancipatory interest of political autonomy, arising from the legacy of the Kantian *Aufklärung* and its Rousseauian and New England counterparts (*Lumières* and the Scottish, common-sense Enlightenment). It is in this political-theoretical context that we should seek to re-situate our educational and institutional reform and to restructure programs of basic and higher education in order to avoid the technical reductionisms and scientific monopolies of ideological, partisan, and religious comprehensive doctrines.

We know that the development of Western political thought, since the times of the ancient Greeks, has been guided by articulating an ideal of education (*paideia*) with the project of conceiving the best form of the state constitution (*politeia*). The political pedagogy of liberal thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, and Kant consolidated the normative bases of the modern democratic State. The systematic investment in elementary education and in the formation (*Bildung*) of citizens, including the promotion of liberal arts and sciences, was equally decisive for the emergence of more civilized societies and an economically developed Europe, North America, Oceania, Japan, and South Korea. In fact, only the articulation between democracy and the so-called learning processes enables full, participatory citizenship, at once inclusive and empowering. Thus, every citizen must be able to learn to better prepare for life, to fully develop all of their capabilities, and enter the labor market as autonomous agents, both in the private and public spheres. Unfortunately, this has not been a priority for neoliberal rulers in Brazil, and the disregard for the education of their people throughout several centuries was one of the decisive factors that contributed to a country with so many natural and human resources that remain today one of the most unequal on the planet.

Certainly, Brazilians are tired of seeing many of their representatives and politicians at the three levels of public management (municipal, state, and federal) act in pursuit of their own particular interests, often to the detriment of the collective well-being and the true common good of our nation. After all, very few politicians in our country do take education seriously because it is an investment in the medium and long term, without immediate results for their electoral interests - starting with their own re-election and the preservation of their electoral basis. Without educational public policies, there is no future for workers in this country, just as there will be no place for technological innovation, scientific research, graduate studies, and an ever-growing creation of new jobs and new forms of entrepreneurship in an ever-increasing, more competitive, and globalized world. Educational training and opportunities for quality education for all Brazilians are the biggest and most significant moral revolution we can postulate for our threatened democracy. To leave John Dewey with the last word: "All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral" (Dewey, 1985, p. 288).

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