

The place of biology and anthropology in Dewey's ethical project

O lugar da biologia e da antropologia no projeto ético de Dewey

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Abstract: This article focuses on Dewey's uses of scientific and evolutionary insights in ethics. To begin with, an overview of Dewey's ethics is presented. It is pointed out that his position on ethics must be understood as a political project that advocates for the use of scientific knowledge in dealing with ethical and political conflicts. In turn, this point of view is based on the thesis of the *material* and *methodological* continuity between science and ethics. The second section addresses the question of Dewey's approach to the bond of science and philosophy in general, and the value of evolutionary theory and anthropology to ethics in particular. Contrary to some current interpretations, it is argued that, according to Dewey, biology and evolution theory do not have the only nor the final say on ethics, and that in his opinion the relevance of anthropology and social sciences must not be overlooked. Moreover, it is argued that the material continuity between science and ethics highlights the importance of a scientifically informed ethical deliberation when facing ethical problems, while the methodological continuity shows how it is possible to reach sound conclusions in ethics but also the relevance of what can be called *genealogical critiques* concerning inherited moral beliefs.

Keywords: Anthropology. Dewey. Ethics. Evolution theory.

Resumo: *O foco deste artigo consiste nos usos dos insights científico e evolucionário na ética de Dewey. Para começar, apresenta-se uma visão geral da ética de Dewey. Salienta-se que a posição dele na ética deve ser entendida como um projeto político que advoga para o uso do conhecimento científico ao lidar com os conflitos éticos e políticos. Por sua vez, esse ponto de vista baseia-se na tese da continuidade material e metodológica entre a ciência e a ética. A segunda parte trata da questão da abordagem de Dewey ao vínculo da ciência e da filosofia, em geral, e o valor da teoria da evolução e da antropologia à ética, em especial. Contrário a algumas interpretações atuais, argumenta-se que, segundo Dewey, a biologia e a teoria da evolução não possuem a única nem a palavra final sobre a ética, e que em sua opinião, a relevância da antropologia e das ciências sociais não deverão ser negligenciadas. Além disso, argumenta-se que a continuidade material entre a ciência e a ética destaca a importância de uma deliberação ética cientificamente informada quando os problemas éticos são enfrentados, enquanto a continuidade metodológica mostra*

como é possível atingir conclusões corretas na ética, mas também, a relevância que pode ser denominada de críticas genealógicas referentes às crenças morais hereditárias.

Palavras-chave: Antropologia. Dewey. Ética. Teoria da evolução.

1 Introduction

In the last few years, controversies have arisen around the relationship between what can be called the moral life of human beings and their biological condition. As Frans de Waal (2009) points out, two opposing views can be held regarding this subject. In the first place, one that maintains that morality is exclusively human and, what is more, a kind of constraint imposed by culture on emotional animal impulses and on nature itself. On the other hand, one that states that morality has evolutionary roots and cannot be thought of as a cultural layer opposing nature or impressed on it. Instead, there is continuity between morality and culture. In order to support this position, de Waal mentions several studies on primates and other mammals showing the presence of empathy and reciprocity within the non-human animal world, understood as foundations on which moral conscience is built. These positions have both been criticized. Indeed, the former is said to be a type of blind rationalism which neglects the obvious continuities between human and non-human animals. Furthermore, it seems to depend on certain rational/emotional or natural/cultural dichotomies which have been deeply questioned by contemporary philosophy. On the other hand, the naturalist position is usually regarded as a form of reductionism which does not acknowledge the human ability to go beyond natural ends and values to state new ones.

The naturalistic position has been linked with John Dewey's thinking. In fact, following Jerome Popp (2007), Dewey could be considered as evolution's first philosopher. His biological understanding of experience as the base of all intelligent behavior—of which moral behavior is only an instance—seems to prove Dewey's commitment to a position similar to de Waal's. However, Dewey's conception of Ethics and its relationship with Biology is not that simple. For instance, there seems to be a prominent change in Dewey's thinking from the more biological stance in his early writings to the more cultural position of later works as *Ethics* or "Theory of Valuation." Indeed, this change has been understood as a *cultural turn*, which would have important consequences regarding Dewey's uses of scientific and evolutionary insights in ethics.

This article focuses on those uses. To begin with, the first section presents an overview of Dewey's ethics, highlighting the fact that his position on ethics must be understood as a political project that advocates for the use of scientific knowledge in dealing with ethical and political conflicts. In turn, this point of view is based on the thesis of the *material* and *methodological* continuity between science and ethics. The second section addresses the question of Dewey's approach to the link between science and philosophy in general, and the value of evolution theory and anthropology in particular. Contrary to some current interpretations, it is argued that Dewey's distinction between ethics as a philosophical endeavor and ethics from the point of view of moral agents, that is, reflective ethics, enables

us to understand the proper place of evolution theory without overlooking the relevance of social sciences. In order to clarify Dewey's position on that regard, the question of the cultural turn in his thinking is addressed. Moreover, it is argued that the material continuity between science and ethics highlights the importance of a scientifically informed ethical deliberation when facing ethical problems, while the methodological continuity shows how it is possible to reach sound conclusions in ethics but also the relevance of what can be called *genealogical critiques* concerning inherited moral beliefs.

2 Dewey's ethical project

When considering Dewey's ethics it is important to keep in mind his distinction between (a) customary ethics, (b) reflexive ethics and (c) ethics as a philosophical endeavor (*LW* 7:162). The first two are ways in which human beings can deal with ethical problems either by appealing to some pre-established form of answer, that is, to some previous traditional habit (a), or by finding a solution matching the peculiarities of the problem through intelligence (b). This latter is the subject-matter of ethics as a philosophical undertaking and hence one of its main tasks is to reconstruct the *logic* of ethical deliberation. In a 1902 article Dewey's states that "Ethical science is primarily concerned with problems of validity [...]. It belongs to logic, to the theory of points of view, the categories, and of the methods that develop these points of view, to discuss the validity of morality *überhaupt*" (*MW* 2:21). In a similar way, in his "Theory of Valuation" (*LW* 13, 1939) it can be read that "A theory of valuation as theory can only set forth the conditions which a method of formation of desires and interests must observe in concrete situations" (*LW* 13,242). Thus, as philosophical task, these conditions must be reconstructed. This reconstruction takes as its starting point an approach to moral judgment as *practical* judgment, that is, as a judgment about *what to do* (see *LW* 12:169-170). Dewey favors the possibility of justifying ethical judgments inasmuch as they are practical resolutions and provided that—in his opinion—there is no relevant logical difference between ethical judgments and the ordinary decisions that humans make in everyday life, in technical issues or even in scientific inquiry. In short, Dewey maintains that if justification is possible in these latter fields—as it certainly is—then it is possible in ethical issues too (see *LW* 13:217-218).

On the other hand, as in every field of intelligent human action, in ethics, conclusions are also based on premises which are stated, selected and supported—whenever necessary—through the process of inquiry or deliberation. Among these premises, propositions about means-consequences relationships can be found, as well as propositions about the desires, goals or ends-in-view actually held and general propositions about values or *generalized ends-in-view*. In other words, when moral agents try to solve problems in a rational or intelligent way—through deliberation—they *should* consider: (a) the real conditions and consequences of the things and processes involved in the problematic situation to be solved; (b) their desires and goals along with their conditions and consequences; and finally, (c) previous values and moral principles that are relevant to the concrete situation and the ways in which they could be affected or compromised (see *LW* 13:244). Only if these elements are considered, stated in propositions and evaluated, a *logically* satisfactory solution—one which fulfils the requirements of intelligent behavior—

can be reached. It is worth noting that the consideration of desires and the ends-in-view related to them imply appraising them as means of settling the question. It is by virtue of this process that *new* desires emerge as *intelligently chosen desires* (see *LW* 13:213). As Gouinlock (1978) and Hook (1950) emphasize, this is paramount because in Dewey's ethical political project it is essential for ends and values to be *wanted* so that they can serve as guides to human practices.¹

Contrary to philosophical tradition and the belief in the peculiar character of ethical issues, Dewey stresses the relevance of the first component of ethical deliberation which is not traditionally understood as *ethical*. Indeed, as the study of cause-consequence relationships is understood as scientific, it is generally considered as not pertaining to ethics. However, according to Dewey, it is an important component because it provides not the only but the best possible starting point to appraise desires and goals. Thus, Dewey maintains that a *scientifically* informed ethical deliberation is possible, *desirable*, and the best way to address ethical problems. Accordingly, it is an *ethical-political proposal* and a project in which education is the key as it can be seen in the next quotation:

Indulge for a moment in an imaginative flight. Suppose that men had been systematically educated in the belief that the existence of values can cease to be accidental, narrow and precarious only by human activity directed by the best available knowledge. Suppose also men had been systematically educated to believe that the important thing is not to get themselves personally "right" in relation to the antecedent author and guarantor of these values, but to form their judgments and carry on their activity on the basis of public, objective and shared consequences. Imagine these things and then imagine what the present situation might be (*LW* 4.37-38).

Although the relation between ethics and science is analyzed in more detail later on, it is worth adding here that this project does not imply *reducing* ethical problems to scientific issues as if it were possible to delegate the solutions of moral problems to neutral scientific experts. Indeed, the second and the third component of ethical deliberation, namely, the consideration of desires and of values, suggests that ethical deliberation can only be carried out by moral agents committed to their desires and their values, norms or principles.

The approach presented so far is susceptible to criticism, which is worth considering in order to clarify Dewey's position. For instance, a charge of circularity and of infinite regress could be made. Even though it is not possible to analyze in depth these charges here, it can be said that Dewey is not *analyzing* the ethical meaning of sentences in the sense of reducing it to some non-ethical component. If this were the case, both criticisms would apply. Actually, from the point of view of a moral agent engaged in a problem-solving process there is no circularity, for it is not the conclusion which is used as a premise, but different beliefs about desires or values. Indeed, moral agents do not try to "deduce" a conclusion from a set of

1 This is an important point that is overlooked by M. White (1949, 1996) in his criticism of Dewey.

premises. They are rather trying to *reach* a sound solution to the problematic situation they face and, in order to do this, they use the instruments they have at hand on the condition that the logical and ethical requirements of intelligent deliberation be satisfied. This consideration explains why the logical reconstruction of moral deliberation cannot be presented in an argumentative scheme similar to those presented in formal logic. Moral deliberation is not equivalent to an argumentative defense of moral points of view previously reached. The logic of moral deliberation is that by which sound resolutions of moral problems are achieved. To put it another way, it is a logic of *sound discovery*.

This also explains why the charge of infinite regress does not apply either. As a matter of fact, in real moral deliberation as well as in real scientific research, the *facts of the case* must be stated (see *LW* 12:112). As, in Dewey's viewpoint, it is not possible for a completely indeterminate situation to be converted into a problem, there are always unproblematic or *determinate* facts and rules that can be taken for granted and whose identification is indeed the first step to reaching a solution. Therefore, in real problem-solving processes there is no infinite regress even if something previously considered as a fact of the case were called into question. In such a case, it would be necessary only to engage in a deeper inquiry and no logical problem arises. To the extent that moral deliberation is controlled *inference* and not mere reasoning, to use Dewey's distinction, there is no need for true premises serving as bedrocks for inquiry. Indeed, in many occasions, hypothetical and even incorrect premises are the starting point of successful inquiries (see *LW* 12:145). Regarding inquiry, the Cartesian principle stating that *what is more perfect can't arise from what is less perfect* does not hold.²

On the other hand, the nature of these previous values or ends can be called into question. Dewey's naturalism prevents him from accepting any form of objectivism related to values. In fact, this kind of objectivism which states some underlying or supervenient reality is rejected by Dewey as a form of pre-Darwinian supernaturalism. Another possibility would be to identify values with impulses, emotions or desires as they spring up in human life. According to Dewey, this answer implies some confusion similar to a naturalistic fallacy and, what is more, it impedes any form of intelligent or rational treatment of values, provided that desires, emotions and impulses are usually understood as irrational or at least as non-rational. The consequence that values and ends are beyond human hands follows from both positions: either because values are given by God or Rationality, or because they are irrational conditions which human beings cannot choose or change, at least not in a rational way. This situation implies that instead of being intelligently evaluated and chosen, the values behind human practices and institutions are imposed by traditional forces which generally represent limited interests. It is worth noting that the problem is not only one of philosophical interpretation but an ethical and political choice between customary or reflective Ethics.

2 This *dictum* is in fact related to Descartes' chain metaphor, which is questioned by Peirce: "Reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected." (CP 5.265). Because inquiry is not a chain, it is not necessary for each link to be as strong as the following.

However, if values and principles are not God's will nor Rational *a priori* imperatives; if they are neither bare emotional constraints, how can they be understood? According to Dewey, they are similar to any valid general idea: they are formulations of the way in which suitable solutions have been reached in past situations. In his own words:

Similar situations recur; desires and interests are carried over from one situation to another and progressively consolidated. A schedule of general ends results, the involved values being "abstract" in the sense of not being directly connected with any particular existing case but not in the sense of independence of all empirically existent cases (*LW* 13:230).

Once these general ideas have been formulated, they can be used as instruments in further problematic situations. They are tools: "A moral principle, then, is not a command to act or forbear acting in a given way: *it is a tool for analyzing a special situation*, the right or wrong being determined by the situation in its entirety, and not by the rule as such" (*LW* 7:280). The usefulness, relevance and suitability of these principles are always hypothetical and are assessed and confirmed in and by each new use. Specifically, they are *methodological* instruments which suggest how to proceed and what is to be taken into account in order to reach a more suitable solution (see *LW* 13:230). For instance, according to Dewey, the so-called golden rule,

[...] gives the agent a basis for looking at and examining a particular question that comes up. It holds before him certain possible aspects of the act; it warns him against taking a short or partial view of the act. It economizes his thinking by supplying him with the main heads by reference to which to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important considerations for which he should be on the lookout (*LW* 7:280).

In concluding this section, it is important to mention that the methodological nature of values and principles is but a sample of the continuity of ethics and science: from a logical or methodological point of view, there is no significant difference between them. Science as well as ethics examines observable things and their relations and uses general ideas as a means of leading the inquiry. But, as seen earlier, the continuity is also material: in Dewey's opinion, scientific statements about facts can and must be used in ethical inquiries. At this point, the question could be to which sciences one can appeal to when addressing ethical issues. In the next section, the relevance of evolution theory and anthropology is analyzed.

3 Science and Ethics

As mentioned before, Dewey's conception of ethics has been understood as an ally of, or at least as a precedent for, contemporary evolutionary ethics (TEEHAN, 2002). This interpretation seems to be supported by three main considerations. In the first place, Dewey's understanding on the bond of science and philosophy would make

him sympathetic to the use of scientific achievements within philosophy. In the second place, the relevance of evolution theory to ethics would be a consequence of his naturalism. Finally, some of Dewey's writings as "Evolution and Ethics" (*EW* 5:34-54, 1898) or "The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality" (*MW* 2:1-38, 1902) suggest that this understanding is indeed right. However, the essential relevance of *intelligent* deliberation, the insistence on value choice and the relative lack of evolutionary vocabulary in Dewey and Tufts' *Ethics* (*LW* 7, 1932) and in "Theory of Valuation" (*LW* 13:189-254, 1939) seem to point in another direction.

This difference has been explained by appealing to a *cultural turn* in Dewey's thinking (GOLDMAN, 2012; RYAN, 1995) which would account for Dewey's late shift from *Experience* to *Culture* (*LW* 1:361) in *Experience and Nature* (GOLDMAN, 2002, p. 8). This understanding finds support in light of two papers in which Dewey stresses the importance of the "social" and of anthropology for philosophy and ethics, namely, *Anthropology and Ethics* (*LW* 3:11-24, 1927) and *The Inclusive Philosophic Idea* (*LW* 3:41-54, 1928). In fact, the former supports the idea that anthropological knowledge can shed light on the understanding of contemporary behavior and society, and consequently, of morality.³ The relevance of anthropology is explained as follows: "As a matter of fact, there is hardly a phase of primitive culture which does not recur in some field or aspect of life to-day" (*LW* 3:11). What is more, in Dewey's opinion "older beliefs and attitudes correspond to some need and condition that still exists" (*LW* 3:11) and that is why anthropological knowledge of those beliefs can be helpful to understand current beliefs and attitudes.⁴

3 It is worth mentioning that, regarding moral ideas, Dewey anticipates some of the methodological stances of Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* (1986). Considering the lack of consensus regarding the relevance of anthropology in ethics, Dewey affirms that "part of the diversity is due to a desire, which cannot be realized in any case, to differentiate sharply between moral conceptions and practices, on the one side, and manners and economic, domestic, religious, legal, and political relations on the other. In early peoples these traits are so fused that attempts to mark out what is distinctively moral become arbitrary, the writer having to use some criterion which appeals to him at the present time as peculiarly ethical in character. Certain phases of conduct have in the course of time become associated with distinctive, even explicit moral ideas. But this holds for popular practices and beliefs of the present time much less than theoretical moralists suppose. In other words, present as well as early morals are largely a *complex blend*, and the ideas taken for granted and expounded by theorists have had but little effect on popular consciousness, except when associated with religion and law—which again illustrates a feature of primitive morals. In short, the great demand on the part of moral theory is first an objective study of the types of conduct prevailing in early societies, *without any attempt at artificial divisions into morals, religion, law, and manners*, and secondly, a history of the transmission and modification of these habits of life, within groups and in their contacts with one another. This is an immense task and will be accomplished but slowly." (our italics, *lw*.3.19). This position is remarkably similar to Latour's (see, LATOUR, 2007, p. 23 and ff).

4 Another point worth mentioning is that Dewey argues that since the emotional factor is universal and intense, the changes in moral beliefs and attitudes that take place in history must be explained by appealing to changes in institutions and intellectual changes (*LW* 3:20), in this respect, scientific and technological interests are particularly relevant (*LW* 3:11).

In the second of the aforementioned articles, Dewey maintains that the idea of the social as an outcome of human associated behavior is something that philosophy should take into account. But, as he asserts, “denial of opposition between the social and natural is, however, an important element of the meaning of ‘social’ as a category” (LW 3:44). Consequently, there is a need for a naturalized social science: “In the degree in which what passes for social science is built upon the notion of a gap between natural and social phenomena, that science is truncated, arbitrary and insecure.” (LW 3:45) From this starting point, Dewey explicitly states that appealing to the social allows for replying to those who maintain that a naturalist stance on moral life is but a reduction of it to a strictly animal plane. Thus, Dewey is committed to a naturalism that recognizes the distinctive traits of human association (LW 3:52), in a similar way to the continuity postulate that he would state in *Logic* (LW 12, 1938), which excludes reduction as well as complete breaks concerning human and non-human faculties (see LW 12:30).

It is clear in these writings that, according to Dewey, biology and evolution theory do not have the only nor the final say on ethics. However, it does not mean that there is a turn or change in his thinking. As a matter of fact, Dewey's interest in anthropology can be traced to his Michigan days. As Torres and Hobbs (2016) mention, he taught a course on “anthropological ethics” as early as 1894 which, in their opinion, demonstrates that Dewey “was well versed in anthropological knowledge and employed it as the starting point for ethics” (2016, p. 127). On the other hand, a closer examination of the early articles mentioned before shows that there are no significant differences between the approach presented there and the one set forth in later works such as *Ethics* (LW 7, 1932) or *Theory of Valuation* (LW 13:189-254, 1939).

For instance, in “Evolution and Ethics”, Dewey asserts that the natural and the ethical processes are not opposite (EW 5:41, 1898), and that the greatest difference between them is related to the change in environment. Regarding the ethical process, the “fitness” depends on conditions that include “the existing social structure with all the habits, demands and ideals which are found in it” (EW 5:39, 1898). Thus, this process, natural as it is, has its own characteristics. At the same time, men's animal inheritance must not be considered an “enemy to the moral life, simply because without it no life is possible.” (EW 5:43, 1898). Dewey makes the same point as regards continuity as he would 40 years later and uses evolution theory to understand human life and particularly its ethical dimension. However, in keeping with the continuity thesis, reduction is not an option. In a few words, in his early as well as in his later writings, Dewey develops a scientifically informed philosophical understanding of ethical phenomenon in which naturalized social sciences are also relevant.⁵

5 Dewey's use of science for philosophical purposes is a critical use, and cannot be understood as a form of scientificism. In his opinion, a critical distance must be kept, and criticism is needed: “This reference to the sciences is not to be regarded, however, as implying an adoption of that conception of philosophy which identifies it exclusively with either an analysis or a synthesis of the premises or results of the special sciences. On the contrary, the sciences themselves are outgrowths of some phase of social culture, from which they derive their instruments, physical and intellectual, and by which their

However, nothing has been stated regarding the use of evolutionary insights when facing ethical problems. Therefore, the question remains if evolution theory is relevant to moral agents as well, that is, to *reflective Ethics*. As argued before, science is *materially* and *methodologically* relevant to ethics. According to Dewey, science in general is relevant since, in order to achieve a sound solution, moral agents must take into account the means/cause-consequence relations between objects, actions and processes involved in the problematic situation, which are not limited to purely ethical subject-matter. Indeed, according to Dewey it is not possible to “differentiate sharply between moral conceptions and practices, on the one side, and manners and economic, domestic, religious, legal, and political relations on the other.” (*LW* 3:19). This is what was called the *material continuity* between science and ethics.⁶ In relation to this material continuity, the relevance of different sciences depends on the particular traits of the situation.

On the other hand, the *methodological continuity* implies that ethical and scientific inquiry share the same logical pattern reconstructed by Dewey in *Logic* (*LW* 12). But there is still an important point that needs mentioning. In “The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality” (*MW* 2:1-38, 1902), Dewey presents what can be called a *genealogical critique* as the methodological role-model from evolution theory which ethics could use. This *historical* or *genetic* method, as he calls it, consists of tracing the genesis and history of the moral belief being assessed. Norms, ideals and beliefs in general arise “out of certain situations, in response to the demands of those situations.” (*MW* 2:23, 1902). Once they have become a habit, they continue serving as guides for conduct. The genealogical method suggests that the origin and history of a belief must be traced and that this can offer “some reason to attribute worth to it.” (*MW* 2:25, 1902). In Dewey’s words:

We must consider [moral beliefs and attitudes] with reference to the antecedents which evoked it, and with reference to its later career and fate. It arises in a certain context, and as a reaction to certain circumstances; it has a subsequent history which can be traced. It maintains and reinforces certain conditions, and modifies others. It becomes a stimulus which provokes new modes of action. Now when we see how and why the belief came about, and also know what else came about because of it, we have a hold upon the worth of the belief [...] (1902, *MW* 2:26-27).

This conception is indeed the same that Dewey presents in his later writings.

problems and aims are set. The only philosophy that can ‘criticize’ the premises of the special sciences without running the danger of being itself a pseudo-science is that which takes into account the anthropological (in its broadest sense) basis of the sciences, just as the only one that can synthesize their conclusions, without running a like danger, is the one which steps outside these conclusions to place them in the broader context of social life” (*LW* 3:46).

6 According to Dewey’s understanding of the pattern of inquiry, this continuity is not exclusively between scientific research and Ethics but also takes into account common sense inquiry.

As seen, in *Ethics* (LW 7, 1932) as well as in *Theory of Valuation* (LW 13, 1939), he develops an approach for ethical deliberation as practical judgment according to which values and principles are used as methodological hypothesis which are confirmed or called into question through the process of inquiry. What is more, human beings should be cautious regarding these inherited principles. In Dewey's words, "each generation, especially one living in a time like the present, is under the responsibility of overhauling its inherited stock of moral principles and reconsidering them in relation to contemporary conditions and needs" (LW 7:283). Once again, in this examination, the genealogical critique is of great importance. In "Theory of Valuation" Dewey asserts that "[...] historical and cultural-anthropological knowledge [...] is *a sine qua non* of ability to formulate valuation-propositions" (LW 13:243, 1939). Individuals have to use the knowledge of past valuations in order to reach sound conclusions about present valuations and desires: within the limits of his personal experience, an individual "revises his desires and purposes as he becomes aware of the consequences they have produced in the past. This knowledge is what enables him to foresee probable consequences of his prospective activities and to direct his conduct accordingly." (LW 13:243, 1939). Dewey provides a clear illustration of the kind of analysis he is thinking about:

Suppose, for example, that it be ascertained that a particular set of current valuations have, as their antecedent historical conditions, the interest of a small group or special class in maintaining certain exclusive privileges and advantages, and that this maintenance has the effect of limiting both the range of the desires of others and their capacity to actualize them. Is it not obvious that this knowledge of conditions and consequences would surely lead to revaluation of the desires and ends that had been assumed to be authoritative sources of valuation? Not that such revaluation would of necessity take effect immediately. But, when valuations that exist at a given time are found to lack the support they have previously been supposed to have, they exist in a context that is highly adverse to their continued maintenance (LW 13:244, 1939).

4 Concluding Remarks

This paper has focused on Dewey's conception of ethics. It has been argued that this conception must be understood as a political project, as a proposal concerning how ethical conflicts are to be handled. If human beings were taught to solve ethical problems by analyzing concrete situations and by using the available information instead of worrying about being personally right in relation to pre-established norms, things could be different. However, this is not a merely normative stance. It is rather an educational program, based on philosophical as well as scientific knowledge. Concerning this program, primatology or neuroscience are as relevant as anthropology, sociology or history. This is one of the dimensions of the bond between science and ethics in Dewey's thinking: as a philosophical endeavor, ethics has to make use of science in order to reach a better understanding of human

morality. In that vein, it has been argued that, contrary to some interpretations, the continuity between Dewey's early and later viewpoints suggests that there is not a deep cultural turn in his thinking but at most a relative abandonment of evolutionary language.

However, from a point of view concerned with human activity, the important question is how it is possible to overcome ethical problems in an intelligent way. With regard to this problem, science is relevant as well. In the first place, ethical deliberation should take into account the conditions, possibilities and consequences of the actions and processes involved in the concrete situation, and scientific knowledge can provide information about it. In other words, there is material continuity between Science and Ethics and scientific information can be a fruitful tool in addressing ethical issues. On the other hand, Ethics has yet another lesson to learn from science: moral principles can be used as methodological hypotheses and must be revised in the light of their genesis and history. Genealogical critiques are a powerful tool to assess current ethical beliefs. This kind of moral argumentation has been questioned and it is not without problems. For instance, it has been understood has a form of *genetic fallacy*. Despite that the answer to this criticism must wait for another occasion, it can be pointed out even if such a form of argumentation might not *prove* the falsity of the moral principle being analyzed, it can be a powerful tool in its critical assessment.

In conclusion, it is worth adding that in a context in which philosophers tend to be fascinated by scientific achievements, Dewey can help us to remember that, despite the important and valuable role that science can play in addressing social problems, the question of the values that should or must guide our practices, is up to us. We cannot avoid taking decisions nor delegate this task on some neutral scientist even if we must inform our decisions through the best available knowledge. That is why to improve education is now, as it was in the past, the task before us.

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Data de recebimento: 27-02-2018

Data de aprovação: 28-11-2018