

Basic human needs as values: exploring John Dewey's normative perspective on social philosophy

Necessidades humanas básicas como valores: explorando a perspectiva normativa de John Dewey sobre a filosofia social

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Abstract: John Dewey's project on social philosophy has not been usually considered as an important piece of his thought. However, his writings about such topic constitute a remarkable effort to articulate several novel concepts and ideas which cannot be found elsewhere in his extensive philosophical work. Within this context, the new edition of his "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy"—a series of lectures Dewey delivered during his stay in China—provides unique material for reviewing his social viewpoint. During this article I aim to explore Dewey's normative perspective on social philosophy. Taking into account that the pragmatist introduces a "normative picture" and that he identifies a set of basic human needs at its very basis, the main arising question is how to interpret that set of human needs so as to fully understand that normative criterion. As hypotheses, I consider (i) that social philosophy is mainly engaged with practical judgments and (ii) that it is plausible to interpret these basic human needs as values. In order to support these claims, I firstly reconstruct Dewey's proposal about a third type of social thought. Secondly, I examine his position about values and standards. Thirdly, I analyze his "normative picture" and I consider the "anthropological reading" presented by Roberto Frega (2015). Lastly, I offer a complementary analysis, arguing that it is possible to explain Dewey's normative standard in a coherent way with respect to the aims of his social thought and, furthermore, that it is possible to avoid any essentialist commitment.

Keywords: Basic human needs. John Dewey. Normative standard. Social philosophy. Values.

Resumo: *o projeto de John Dewey sobre a filosofia social não tem sido considerado como uma peça importante de seu pensamento. Entretanto, seus textos sobre esse tópico constituem um notável esforço para articular diversos novos conceitos e ideias, os quais não podem ser encontrados em outra parte de sua extensa obra filosófica. Inserida nesse contexto, a nova edição de suas "Palestras em filosofia política e social" – série de palestras que Dewey apresentou quando esteve na China – fornece um material único para revisar seu ponto de vista social. Levando-se em consideração que o pragmatista introduz uma "figura normativa" e que ele identifica um conjunto de necessidades humanas básicas de maneira a compreender*

plenamente esse critério normativo. Como hipótese, considero (i) que a filosofia social está principalmente associada com juízos práticos e (ii) que é plausível interpretar essas necessidades humanas básicas como valores. Para sustentar essas afirmações, primeiro, reconstruo a proposta de Dewey sobre um terceiro tipo de pensamento social. Segundo, examino sua posição sobre valores e normas. Terceiro, analiso a “figura normativa” e considero a “leitura antropológica” apresentada por Roberto Frega (2015). Por fim, ofereço uma análise complementar, argumentando que é possível explicar o padrão normativo de Dewey de maneira coerente com respeito aos propósitos do seu pensamento social – e, além disso, que é possível evitar qualquer compromisso essencialista.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia social. John Dewey. Necessidades humanas básicas. Padrão Normativo. Valores.

1 Introduction

Between May, 1919 and October, 1921, John Dewey visited China and delivered a series of lectures in Peking, Beijing and the provinces of Shandong and Shanxi. These lectures included topics such as social and political philosophy, philosophy of education, ethics and experimental logic. For many decades, the typescripts of Dewey's talks about social and political philosophy had been considered lost and the only existing publication related to them was a “back translation” into English from a Chinese transcription of the oral presentations (CLOPTON and OU, 1973). However, working at the Hu Shi Archives in Beijing, Prof. Yung-chen Chiang discovered a series of notes typed by Dewey himself and corresponding to nine out of the sixteen lectures he presented at Peking University in 1919. Due to this finding, since 2015, an improved edition of Dewey's “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy” has been available (DEWEY, 2015), providing unique material for reconsidering his social thought.

Dewey's project of social philosophy has not been usually considered as an important piece of his philosophical account, especially in comparison with his developments about the theory of inquiry, the theory of valuation, politics or even aesthetics. Nevertheless, the pragmatist was certainly interested in social philosophy and a close reading of his writings on this subject gives account of a remarkable effort to articulate several novel concepts and ideas which cannot be found elsewhere in his extensive work. Within this context, it is worth mentioning that Dewey's lectures in China about social philosophy have received an ambivalent treatment by specialists. On one hand, scholars such as Hildreth (2009) or Rogers (2009) refer to Dewey's conception of political power, a topic largely discussed during the talks, without mentioning them at all. On the other hand, several scholars consider these lectures to be crucial elements in understanding Dewey's democratic conception as profoundly pluralist (WESTBROOK, 1993, Ch. 8), in considering his experimental approach to politics (WANG, 2007, Ch. 2), in reconstructing the influence of Hegelianism upon deweyan social and political thought (MIDTGARDEN, 2011), in framing Dewey's own position with respect to the issues of political power and social criticism (MIDTGARDEN, 2012) and for analyzing the reciprocal influence between deweyan philosophy and his stay in China, concerning especially the

impact of the May Fourth Movement on Dewey's social viewpoint as well as his activism during the conflict (MARTIN, 2002; WANG, 2007).¹ Besides that, the recent edition of "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy" has encouraged scholars to reassess Dewey's theory of social conflict (FREGA, 2015) or social ontology (TESTA, 2017a, b), as well as to improve the analysis of the significance of Dewey's visit to China in the broader context of his thought (GRONDA, 2015).

During this article I aim to explore Dewey's normative perspective on social philosophy, a topic in which the pragmatist was acutely interested in and that has not received sufficient attention. Dewey presents his stand as a third type of social thought, different from the idealistic as well as the conservative theories. In a few words, Dewey explains that such third type of social thought is oriented to introduce more conscious regulation into the course of events in behalf of the general or public interests considering the specific and concrete situations. At this point, such an approach seems quite coherent with respect to his general philosophical assumptions. However, throughout "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy" there are several surprising elements. Firstly, Dewey identifies a series of basic human needs or interests and claims that each of them is related to a particular type of association or group. Secondly, Dewey argues that once a particular group succeeds in satisfying its proper basic human need, it tends to impose its organizational logic upon the whole social life, providing the initial elements for a theory of social conflict. Thirdly, Dewey elaborates an ideal picture according to which social phenomena should be evaluated with reference to the degree of the fulfilment of the above-mentioned basic human needs and to the equal and proportionate development of their respective forms of associated life.

All things considered, a few questions arise: what kind of assumptions is Dewey making about these basic human needs? How should we understand the normative standard he proposes? As hypotheses, I consider (i) that social philosophy is mainly engaged with practical judgments and (ii) that it is plausible to interpret these basic human needs as values. In order to support such claims, I firstly analyze what Dewey means by a third type of social philosophy and I note that its main purpose is related to standards of valuation. Secondly, I refer to "The Logic of Judgments of Practice" so as to reconstruct Dewey's position about values and standards. Thirdly, I examine the "normative picture" presented by the pragmatist during "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy" and I consider the "anthropological reading" presented by Frega (2015, sec. 2). Lastly, I offer a complementary analysis, arguing that under the interpretation I suggest, it is possible to explain Dewey's normative

1 On May 4th, 1919, just three days after Dewey's arrival to China, more than 3000 students held a demonstration in Beijing against the decision of the Versailles Peace Conference to transfer German concessions in Shantung to Japan. During the following weeks, demonstrations widespread all over the country, including general strikes, boycott to Japanese products and a purge of pro-Japanese officials. As a result, several students were arrested and some others were killed. According to Wang (2007, p. 5), the occurrences kept Dewey "[...] excited, involved, puzzled, and, at times, frustrated." Indeed, the pragmatist wrote that "[t]he spell of pessimism seems broken. An act has been done, a deed performed. Perhaps there is now a healthier, better organized, movement from within China itself for China's own salvation than at any time since the Revolution." (DEWEY, "The Student Revolt in China", *MW* 11:191).

standard in a coherent way with respect to the aims of his social thought and, furthermore, that it is possible to avoid any essentialist compromises.

2 Dewey and his third type of social philosophy

“Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy” cannot be taken isolated from the overall context of Dewey's philosophy. To begin with, it is interesting to point out that the 1920's represent an important period in Dewey's career: his trips to Japan, China, Russia, Mexico and Turkey have “[...] undoubtedly broadened his horizon and enriched his understanding of world cultures.” (WANG, 2007, p. 5). Besides that and considering different published and unpublished sources, it seems that between 1916 and 1923 Dewey was actively working on developing a social philosophy (FREGA, 2015; GRONDA, 2015). For instance, the last chapter of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*—a book based on a series of lectures Dewey delivered at the Imperial University of Japan during 1919, just before arriving in China—is devoted to the analysis of the ways in which his proposal of reconstruction in philosophy would affect social philosophy. Dewey argues that traditional social philosophy cannot offer any guidance in dealing with the particularities of life because it is caught up in general answers of supposedly universal meaning to be imposed upon specific situations. In contrast to this, the pragmatist considers that social philosophy should be a guiding method of intelligent inquiry and experimentation with respect to concrete difficulties:

[...] in the question of methods concerned with reconstruction of special situations rather than in any refinements in the general concepts of institution, individuality, state, freedom, law, order, progress, etc., lies the true impact of philosophical reconstruction. (*MW* 12:189).²

Dewey recovers and elaborates on this perspective during his stay in China. “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy” begins by identifying two different kinds of social theories. On one hand, there is an idealistic approach, which conceives of social standards or models as based on something *apart from* and *beyond* existing affairs and which claims that some kind of illumination will enable men “to see the truth and to bring about a radical change” (DEWEY, 2015, p. 9). On the other hand, there is a conservative approach, which aims at justifying existing institutions by finding standards, necessary meanings and fixed relationships *within* affairs and by claiming that things are essentially right and reasonable, and that

2 Frega (2015, sec. 1) presents a comprehensive study of the evolution of Dewey's *idée* on social philosophy and proposes to organize them in four chronological phases: (1) from the early writings to 1901, a period in which there is almost no mention of the expression “social philosophy”; (2) from 1902 to 1918, when Dewey outlines the task of social and political philosophy; (3) from 1919 to 1923, a crucial period, for it includes most of Dewey's writings on the topic; and (4) from 1923 forward, progressively impoverished in its mention of “social philosophy”, even though Dewey remains absolutely interested in social issues, as is clear from texts such as *The Public and Its Problems* (1928), *Individualism. Old and New* (1930) or “Liberalism and Social Action” (1935).

character should be reformed to conform to these true meanings. Although they are very different, Dewey asserts that both types of theories share the common feature of being wholesale, which leads to a common mistake, namely, lacking practical efficacy to direct the required changes. The result is either negative and destructive action, or inaction, passivity or consecration of things as they are (Cf. DEWEY, 2015, p. 10).

In tune with what he had claimed in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey presents a third type of social philosophy and defines it as “the union of the scientific spirit with the moral and practical aim of philosophy” (DEWEY, 2015, p. 12). According to him, the introduction of the *scientific spirit* implies (i) reference to actual facts and the requirement of basing theory upon them, (ii) elimination of partisan glorification and dogmatic habits of mind, (iii) emphasis on the details rather than generalities, (iv) consideration of principles in terms of provisional hypotheses and (v) a demand for experimental verification (Cf. DEWEY, 2015, p. 12). This scientific spirit provides Deweyan social philosophy with the directive power to conduct action lacking in the traditional kinds of social thought. It also makes social philosophy a kind of applied science rather than pure, since it is concerned with the intelligent reshaping of current, specific and concrete conditions—instead of any universal or absolute pretension. Dewey himself is absolutely straightforward to describe his perspective: “It is pragmatic, instrumental” (2015, p. 13).

The other constitutive element of the Deweyan third type of social philosophy is the *moral and practical aim of philosophy*. It appears when there are decisions about needs to be met, aims to be pursued, consequences to be considered as relevant, etc. This is why Dewey claims that “[t]he problem is one of ends and means in a particular situation” (2015, p. 13), that “[s]ocial philosophy should be *a bridge from the existent unsatisfactory situation to a better future state of things based upon accurate knowledge of evils to be corrected and definite projects of change at this point and that*” and that “[...] the third type of philosophy *substitutes discrimination of particular consequences of good and bad, better and worse, for general criticism and justification*” (DEWEY, 2015, p. 15, both quotations, emphasis in the original).

Apart from “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy” there is another important source to analyze Dewey’s social perspective, namely his unpublished “Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals” (MW 15:231). In this set of notes for his classes, Dewey indicates that social philosophy aims at clarifying judgments about social customs, institutions, law, etc., involving studies about the influence of social groups upon the generation of beliefs and standards as well as on the reflex reaction of such beliefs and standards upon different social forces (MW 15:231). Furthermore, at the very beginning of “Syllabus”—and in the same vein as what he had asserted in his lectures in China—, Dewey claims that social philosophy is related to the valuation of social phenomena and that its aim is *ethical*. Considering both the arguments presented by Dewey in his lectures and in his “Syllabus”, it is clear that a key point to understanding his stance is the *standard* of valuation of social phenomena. Taking into account that in “Syllabus”, Dewey refers to “The Logic of Judgments of Practice” (1916, originally published in *Essays in Experimental Logic*, MW 8:14) as a suitable philosophical background to address

these subjects, in the following section I propose to analyze the notions of values and standards as presented in that essay.³

3 Dewey's conception of values and standards

According to Dewey, a judgment of value is a case of a practical judgment, this is, a judgment about “doing something.” Taking this into account, it seems important to recall the general conception of such practical judgments (Cf. *MW* 8.15-21): (i) the subject-matter of practical judgments implies an incomplete situation, so practical judgments are judgments of a situation demanding action and are part of the completion of the situation; (ii) the subject-matter also implies that there may be differences if the situation is completed in one way or another; (iii) practical propositions are binaries because they are, at the same time, about the end and about the means to reach it; (iv) practical judgments imply statements about the given facts of the situation and such statements must be as accurate as possible, considering that the determination of what should be done depends on them; and (v) the determination of end-means is hypothetical until the action it indicates has been tried. As a result, “[a] practical judgment has been defined as a judgment of what to do, or what is to be done: a judgment respecting the future termination of an incomplete and in so far indeterminate situation.” (*MW* 8:30).

As a case of practical judgments, judgments of value involve the value of objects or situations not *per se* but in regard to what is better to do, inherently involving the means-ends relationship. Furthermore, Dewey argues that ends and means present a reciprocal character and introduces the idea of “end-in-view”, this is, a link between conditions and pretended consequences, a hypothetical plan of action: “[t]he end-in-view upon which judgment of action settles down is simply the adequate or complete means to the doing of something” (*MW* 8:38). Indeed, its adequacy is judged by considering whether or not it actually directs action to the reinstatement of unified existing conditions. Within this context, a value is a generalized description of relations between ends and means, practices and duties, dispositions and approbations or, to put it simply, a generalized end-in-view, used to determine what may be expected of any proposed solution and to conduct action in order to modify the existential conditions and re-establish the equilibrium in the situation (Cf. WELCHMAN, 2010, p. 179-180).

Such notion of values as arising from the particular situation is at odds with traditional conceptions that define valuation as a process of comparing goods with some prior, determinate and fixed standard of value. The crucial point is that if we are engaged in intelligent action, we may actually change our standards within the course of valuation considering the current conditions of the situation, since “[t]he more completely the notion of the model is formed outside and irrespective of the specific conditions which the situation of action presents, the less intelligent is the

3 Dewey's writings on the theory of valuation are widespread throughout his philosophy and a complete analysis of them is beyond the scope of this article. I decided to focus on “The Logic of Judgments of Practice” not only considering Dewey's reference in “Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals” but also circumscribing the inquiry to the period in which Dewey was explicitly working on social philosophy.

act. [...] The man who is not accessible to such change in the case of moral situations has ceased to be a moral agent and become a reacting machine" (*MW* 8:38).

Regarding standards, Dewey explains that they arise from values by the same kind of operation according to which values arise from ends-in-view (*MW* 8:46). Hence, in a certain sense, standards are quite similar to values, considering that a standard cannot be something prefabricated to then be mechanically applied, neither can it be immune from determination from outside the process of reflective valuation. Both are patterns, models, rules that are followed or conformed to in action, involving the notion that they have an authoritative claim to control it. However, Dewey adds an extra feature that could be characterized as methodological: for him, "[...] the standard is a rule for conducting inquiry to its completion: it is a counsel to make examination of the operative factors complete, a warning against suppressing recognition of any of them." (*MW* 8:42). Therefore, although they share the former's logical structure and are oriented to the completion of a situation, standards seem to be more general than values. In the following section I propose to return to "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy" so as to consider what Dewey specifically asserts about the normative perspective within the context of his social thought.

4 A normative picture and an anthropological reading

In Lecture III Dewey presents an ideal picture in order to achieve two main goals: on one hand, he tries to point out that a valuable society would be a successfully integrated one; on the other hand, he tries to elaborate a criterion so as to compare and contrast the actual state of things with it. In his own words:

We can frame in imagination a picture in which there is an equal proportionate development of all these forms of associated life, where they interact freely with one another, and where the results of each one contribute to the richness and significance of every other [...]—where in short there is mutual stimulation and support and free passage of significant results from one to another. (DEWEY, 2015, p. 16).

In this quotation, Dewey refers to "forms of associated life" or, more precisely, *groups*. A first definition of group states that it is "[...] a number of people associated together for some purposes, some common activities that hold them" (DEWEY, 2015, p. 16). However, groups are not held together because of *any* purpose or *any* common activity but they are strictly related to what Dewey denominates as *basic human needs*. Indeed, one of the most interesting as well as surprising points of "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy" is the explicit introduction of the idea of human needs. According to Dewey (2015, p. 16), "[h]uman nature has a variety of interests to be served, a number of types of impulses that have to be expressed, or instincts that form needs to be satisfied [...]". Furthermore, Dewey introduces a defined classification of such basic human needs, as follows: (i) reproduction and affective security; (ii) support, sustenance and regular activity; (iii) spiritual guidance and security; (iv) investigation, discovery, intellectual development; and (v) regulation of men's conduct (Cf. DEWEY, 2015, p. 16).

As it was mentioned, there is a strict relationship between these basic human needs and the constitution of groups, at two different levels: firstly, basic human needs could be satisfied only through associated action; secondly, there are specific groups corresponding to each particular need. Thus, for the list (i) to (v), Dewey identifies the following groups or societal forms: (i) family; (ii) industry and business; (iii) churches/religion; (iv) schools, learning societies/science; and (v) governmental association, political society/state.⁴ Each group is qualified by its capacity to satisfy a particular basic human need, they have evolved in order to better fulfil their task, they are evaluated according to that particular capacity, and, according to Dewey, they are “[...] fairly universal modes of union and association.” (2015, p. 16). All things considered, we are before a normative picture that should be derived from the positive phenomena without being a mere record of given valuations, as Dewey demands in “Syllabus” (*MW* 15:231), that should focus on the valuation of *particular* situations while, at the same time, integrating fairly *universal* modes of union and association built upon a set of basic human needs. Taking this into account, the crucial question is how to understand this picture and, particularly, how to interpret this set of basic human needs.

Within the recent literature related to “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy”, I propose to focus on the anthropological reading developed by Frega (2015). According to him, Dewey's whole project on social philosophy seems to hesitate between a procedural criterion, which defines the quality of human interactions, and a substantial criterion, in terms of those basic human needs that each society is supposed to fulfil. In Frega's view, the novelty introduced in “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy” is twofold. Firstly, Dewey explicitly refers to a set of human needs so as account for the normative standard and to integrate both kinds of criterion in an anthropological account. In particular, and following Frega, Dewey “[...] attempts to provide a taxonomy of the basic needs that qualify human nature *before* their cultural articulation and to use them as a normative benchmark for social analysis” and, as it was above-mentioned, “[Dewey] chooses to emphasize a supposedly universal trait, which is to say that *the satisfaction of these basic needs can be achieved only through associated action*”, a theoretical position that “[...] provides the means by which the anthropological invariant is contextually articulated.” (2015, p. 10, all quotations, emphasis in the original). Secondly, Dewey combines the anthropological viewpoint with a sociological hypothesis according to which groups evolve functionally with respect to their capacity to fulfil any of the human needs and, after succeeding in satisfying a human need, tend to impose their organizational logic to other groups, which leads to a theory of social conflict. Therefore, the role of the normative picture introduced by Dewey is to guarantee an equal fulfilment of human needs that would lead to a successful integration of the social groups concurring in this satisfaction. In light of Dewey's theory of conflict,

4 In “Syllabus: Social Institutions and the Study of Morals” (*MW* 15:236), Dewey claims that such fundamental human needs are the basis of groups and their different interests reflect these needs. The list of human needs and groups Dewey presents is the following: (i) support, sustenance/industrial groups; (ii) protection, security/ecclesiastical, military and political groups; (iii) reproduction/family; (iv) recreation, use of leisure/Clubs, etc.; and (v) language, sociability/school, academies, scientific organizations.

the aim of such a normative picture is to regulate social dynamics in order to avoid or reduce domination, social imbalance and monopoly by a certain social group (Cf. FREGA, 2015, sec. 3).

Within this context, Frega raises a crucial question: “Is Dewey here assuming a biological definition of human essence defined in terms of his “native impulses”—something that would patently contradict his most basic ideas, in particular his criticism of transcendental approach to social philosophy?” (2015, p. 10). Frega indicates that Dewey’s theoretical proposal does not contradict his naturalist standpoint for it aims at assessing social phenomena from an immanent criterion, based on how human associations actually exist but taking, at the same time, an independent and normative standpoint. As a result, such criterion would be derived from positive phenomena but not be a mere record of them. In summary, “[i]n his search for more stringent normative criteria for advancing social philosophy as a project of normative evaluation, Dewey sought solutions in the anthropological foundation of social life”, a movement that is “[...] nothing new in the context of Dewey’s commitment to naturalism.” (FREGA, 2015, p. 10, both quotations).

At this point it is worth introducing some comments. To begin with, although Frega provides a complete explanation of Dewey’s theory of social conflict, by stressing the idea that basic human needs refer to a basic human structure, he tends to outline a strong conception of human nature. Indeed, in suggesting that Dewey is trying to provide a taxonomy of these basic human needs *before* their cultural articulation, that there are anthropological *invariants* which are contextually articulated by associated action or that groups are fairly universal modes of union and association because they depend on universal assumptions concerning human nature (Cf. FREGA, 2015, p. 10 and 14) might lead to the interpretation that the pragmatist is indeed assuming some kind of biological definition of human essence—not a philosophical one, based on transcendent features, but an essence after all. In addition, Frega (2015, p. 6) explains that Dewey abandons his project to found his normative social theory on anthropological bases because he intended to reintroduce a procedural account that would be more consistent with his experimental particularism, leaving room to question whether such an anthropological reading presents any inconsistency with the experimental perspective. In the following section I offer an interpretation of basic human needs so as to complement this anthropological reading and to avoid any essentialist feature.

5 A complementary reading: basic human needs as values

To introduce the reading I am advancing, it is crucial to draw some preliminary assertions: if the approach in “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy” aims at evaluating the quality of social dynamics, it is plausible to consider that social philosophy is engaged with practical judgments, this is, judgments about what to do or to be done. In addition, if the aim of social philosophy is ethical, as Dewey himself claims (Cf. Supra: 3), then it is plausible to consider that social philosophy is particularly engaged with judgments of value. Given that, I propose to interpret the set of basic human needs in terms of values.

From my perspective, this reading would allow for the explanation of every major point presented by Dewey while at the same time avoiding the tensions identified in

Frega's analysis. Firstly, reading human needs as values means that they conduct action in order to reach the completion of the initially conflictive situation, so that every decision we make should tend to satisfy or fulfil them. Secondly, considering the context-dependent and reciprocal constitution of ends and means, they are intrinsically related to the course of situation, thus, basic human needs as values are profoundly hypothetical and their adequacy is judged considering if they actually fill the existing need. Therefore, security and reproduction or spiritual guidance, to mention some of the basic needs, are the outcome of the same process of solving initial deficits and their content modifies the existential conditions from which they arise. Thirdly, since it is possible to apply the same process of valuation to our own values whenever there is conflict or deficit in the context of ongoing attempts to realize them under changing conditions of experience, values are profoundly ameliorative. This process may result in revaluations and changes of the content or praise of our values, something that is absolutely consistent with Dewey's ethical perspective. Rather than intending to be an alternative reading, this interpretation complements the anthropological one: (i) if practical judgments imply statements about the given facts, conditions, possibilities and consequences of the situation and (ii) if such statements must be as precise as possible, considering that the determination of what should be done depends on them, then (iii) Dewey's position scientifically informed by anthropology is not only a suitable but a mandatory starting point for developing accurate judgments of value.⁵ As a result, reading basic human needs as values recognizes the critical relevance of deweyan reliance on anthropology but adds a deliberative dimension, crucial for avoiding any kind of essentialism, both biological and philosophical.⁶

In addition, under this reading it is clear that the picture Dewey presents in "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy" is a normative standard consistent with the definition provided in "The Logic of Judgments of Practice", this is, a rule for conducting inquiry, a counsel to make examination of the operative factors complete, a warning against suppressing recognition of any of them. In this case, the normative picture indicates that the analysis of social phenomena must consider every value–basic human need and must take the progressive integration of them as a criterion to guide the valuation of the actual state of things and to conduct action. As Dewey demands

5 As Dewey explains in *The Quest for Certainty*, "[f]or moralists usually draw a sharp line between the field of the natural sciences and the conduct that is regarded as moral. But a moral that frames its judgments of value on the basis of consequences must depend in a most intimate manner upon the conclusions of science. For the knowledge of the relations between changes which enable us to connect things as antecedents and consequences is science. The narrow scope which moralists often give to morals, their isolation of some conduct as virtuous and vicious from other large ranges of conduct, those having to do with health and vigor, business, education, with all the affairs in which desires and affection are implicated, is perpetuated by this habit of exclusion of the subject-matter of natural science from a role in formation of moral standards and ideals." (*LW* 4:219).

6 Although a complete treatment of the following comment is absolutely beyond the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning that such a deliberative dimension is also a key element to face the charge of naturalistic fallacy, for it prevents the conclusion that Dewey derives an "ought" from an "is". Additionally, this feature of deweyan ethics has been considered a very relevant antecedent for evolutionary ethics (See TEEHAN & DICARLO, 2004).

in “Syllabus” (*MW* 15:231), such a standard of valuation is derived from the positive phenomena but is not a record of given valuations because it is a generalization of values and it comes from a whole process of deliberation about what may be expected if we act according to it. Consequently, this standard is not something given and fixed, but it is able to change within the context of particular conditions—unless we want to become a reacting machine. Since this conception of normative standard is a rule for conducting inquiry relating values with positive and concrete content—values which also are, on their own, methodological tools for analyzing particular situations—, this reading also enables one to fully explain what Frega means by the integration between procedural and substantial criterion, with the obvious remark that I prefer avoiding this latter name, considering its essentialist echoes.

Finally, such a reading permits one to understand why Dewey claims that the third type of social thought should be specific and concrete rather than universal. Regarding the fact that the subject matter of practical judgments and judgments of value is an incomplete situation that demands a resolution, that the ends and means we select in order to solve the situation depend on it, and that judgment as a factor of the completion of the situation is tested with respect to its actual consequences, it seems that the situation as a whole is prior to any universal meaning. Indeed, and although values and standards are generalizations, the particular characteristics of the situation exert control over them to the point that it may make changes on such generalizations—and this is precisely why values and standards are intrinsically hypothetical, reaching every condition Dewey makes throughout his writings on social philosophy. As the pragmatist explains:

The conception of an organization of interests or tendencies is often treated as if it were a conception which is definite in subject-matter as well as clear-cut in form. It is taken not as a rule for procedure in inquiry, a direction and a warning (which it is), but as something all of whose constituents are already given for knowledge, even though not given in fact. The act of fulfilling or realizing must then be treated as devoid of intellectual import. It is a mere doing, not a learning and a testing. But how can a situation which is incomplete in fact be completely known until it is complete? Short of the fulfilment of a conceived organization, how can the conception of the proposed organization be anything more than a working hypothesis, a method of treating the given elements in order to see what happens? (*MW* 8:43).

6 Conclusions

During this article I have focused on Dewey’s normative perspective about social philosophy and I have tried to offer a plausible reading of what the pragmatist denominates as basic human needs. I have firstly reconstructed Dewey’s proposal of a third type of social thought, stressing that its aim is mainly ethical because it is concerned with assessing and evaluating social phenomena and that the main question to address is the question about the standard of such valuation. From

this assumption, and following Dewey's reference to "The Logic of Judgments of Practice" as a suitable theoretical framework, I have examined his conceptions of value and standard as hypothetical tools to solve initially incomplete situations and as a rule for conducting inquiry, respectively, so as to examine the normative picture Dewey proposes in the third lecture. This picture involves the novel as well as surprising concept of basic human needs and considering (i) that it constitutes the very foundation of the whole normative picture and (ii) that it seems to contradict some of the most basic deweyan philosophical standpoints, with special reference to his naturalism and anti-transcendentalism, the main task has been how to fully understand what such basic human needs are and if there actually is some incoherence within Dewey's proposal.

In order to achieve this latter goal, I have considered the anthropological analysis offered by Frega. According to him, Dewey's perspective is not incoherent with his general assumptions because it departs from a scientifically informed definition of basic human needs in terms of interests (in this case, with the aid of anthropology) and constructs a normative criterion to assess social phenomena, avoiding any transcendental approach. Nevertheless, from my point of view, Frega's reading leads to a strong conception of human nature which could give rise to the understanding that Dewey is indeed assuming some kind of biological definition of human essence, in particular, if we consider the aforementioned expressions pointing out that Dewey is trying to provide a taxonomy of basic human needs *before* any cultural influence, that there are some anthropological *invariants* contextually articulated or that there are universal assumptions about human nature that would explain why social groups are fairly universal modes of union and association (Cf. FREGA, 2015, p. 10 and 14; *Supra*: 7). Faced with these tensions, I have offered a complementary reading, according to the following line of argument: if (i) Dewey aims at evaluating the quality of social phenomena and (ii) if the aim of social philosophy is ethical, then (iii) it is plausible to consider that social philosophy is particularly engaged with judgments of value; therefore, I have proposed (iv) to interpret the set of basic human needs in terms of values. Such a reading takes into account what Frega explains about how Dewey relies on anthropology to obtain empirical information but reads basic human needs not as given facts but as the result of a deliberative process. Furthermore, this allows for the explanation of the normative picture presented by Dewey as a hypothetical rule for conducting inquiry and as an immanent criterion for assessing social phenomena, reaching every condition Dewey makes for social philosophy.

In conclusion, it is needless to say that "Lectures on Social and Political Philosophy" contain philosophical content that exceeds the topics I have addressed in this article. As it was mentioned, there is a renewed interest in these lectures and they constitute a fundamental piece in the reconstruction of Dewey's social philosophy. In particular, it is possible to further explore the relationship between his theory of social conflict and his account of human nature, including Deweyan arguments as presented in *Human Nature and Conduct* (MW 14) or in later essays like "Human Nature" or "Social Sciences and Social Control" (LW6, both references). Considering that the normative perspective and the very idea of basic human needs are at the basis of such theoretical accounts, I hope this article represents a fruitful starting point for that larger project.

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