

**THE INTERPRETATION OF COMMUNICATION  
FROM DEWEY'S EMPIRICAL NATURALISM.  
CONSEQUENCES FOR FEMINISM.**

**Marta Vaamonde Gamo**

*U.N.E.D; I.E.S. Brianda de Mendoza*  
mvg@terra.com

*"Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful. That things should be able to pass from the plane of external pushing and pulling to that of revealing themselves to man, and thereby to themselves; and that the fruit of communication should be participation, sharing, is a wonder..."<sup>1</sup>*

One of the hallmarks of John Dewey's pragmatism is his interest in social and democratic reform<sup>2</sup>, which closely linked his thinking to feminism.

John Dewey addressed all issues affecting the feminist movement at the turn of the century: the right to vote for women and the need to recognize their civil rights<sup>3</sup>, coeducation as a means of achieving social equality<sup>4</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup>John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925-1996), 1, 132.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Richard Westbrook, "The Making of a Democratic Philosopher", in *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, ed. Molly Cochran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> A summary of Dewey's position on women's right to vote can be seen in: John Dewey, "A Symposium on Woman's Suffrage", in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1911-1996), vol. 6, 153-154.

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey, "Education and the Health of Women", in *Early Works of John Dewey 1882-1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1885-1996), vol. 1, 64-68; John Dewey, "Health and Sex in Higher Education", in *Early Works of John Dewey 1882-1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1886-1996), vol. 1, 69-80; John Dewey, "Letter to A. K. Parker on Coeducation", in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1902-1996), vol. 2, 108-116; John Dewey, "Memorandum to President Harper on Coeducation", in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press,

equality in jobs and salaries<sup>5</sup>; the democratic reconstruction of marital relations<sup>6</sup>; and birth control<sup>7</sup>. He also believed that gender equality was the gauge by which democratic society's degree of development could be checked. He thought that if gender equality did not become a guiding principle for both private and public human relations, the contradictions arising from their practical limitations would be blamed on the democratic ideal itself<sup>8</sup>.

Despite Dewey's close personal and intellectual relations with the first generation of the feminist movement, pragmatism and feminism subsequently separated<sup>9</sup>. Feminism leaned towards other philosophical currents such as marxism, psychoanalysis and existentialism, while pragmatism lost ground in favor of logical positivism and analytic philosophy. This distancing made Charlene Haddock Seigfried exclaim in the nineties: *Where Are All the Pragmatic Feminists?*<sup>10</sup>

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1902-1996), vol. 2, 105-107; John Dewey, "Is Coeducation Injurious to Girls?", in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1911-1996), vol. 6, 155-164.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908-1996), vol. 5, 527.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908-1996), vol. 5, 526; Cf. John Dewey, "What I Believe", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930-1996), vol. 5, 276.

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, J. "The Senate Birth Control Bill", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932-1996), vol. 6, 388-389; John Dewey, "In Defense of Mary Ware Dennett's *The Sex Side of Life*", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930-1996), vol. 17, 127; John Dewey, "Education and Birth Control", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932-1996), vol. 6, 388-389.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Charlene H. Seigfried, *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey* (Pennsylvania: State University Press, University Park, PA, 2001), 59.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Seigfried, *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Charlene H. Seigfried, "Where Are All the Pragmatic Feminists?", *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 1.

Thanks largely to the contributions of this author, over the past two decades a pragmatist feminism has been developing, especially in the USA, allowing the mutual enrichment of feminism and pragmatism. Pragmatism offers feminism a research method, as Nancy Fraser<sup>11</sup> or Seigfried<sup>12</sup> pointed out. Feminism offers pragmatism an analysis of the unconscious matters of conduct and the power relationships which perpetuate sexist stereotypes<sup>13</sup>.

In line with this pragmatist feminism, I will try to show the possibilities what the naturalistic and empirical Deweyan concept of communication offers to the contemporary feminist debate. Dewey proposes a view on communication that overcomes the dilemma between an empty proceduralism and a traditionalism grounded on a substantive vision of the community or of values. The Deweyan alternative is particularly interesting for feminism because, on the one hand, it avoids a proceduralist consideration of discourse and rationality that leaves important aspects of the relations between women and men outside the scope of justice; and on the other hand, the empirical view of communication prevents a substantive vision of certain values from limiting the critical and reflective potential of women and men to guide their relationships.

The first part of the paper presents the links between Dewey's pragmatism and feminism. The second part analyses the Deweyan interpretation of communication, concluding with some of the possibilities that it offers to feminism.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Nancy Fraser, "Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn", in *Feminist Contentions*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser (New York: Routledge, 2011), 166.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Maurice Hamington and Celia Bardwell-Jones, *Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Charlene H. Seigfried, "John Dewey's Pragmatist Feminism", in *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, ed. Seigfried, 55.

### **Links between John Dewey and feminism**

Dewey's interest for democracy led him to defend women's equality as one of its basic aspects and engage with the suffrage movement, in which his wife, Alice Chipman, and one of his best friends, Jane Addams, took part actively. When the *International* organized a symposium on women's suffrage, Dewey said that a society cannot be called democratic if women, a large percentage of its population, do not have the same political rights as men. On August 8, 1912, he taught a summer course on women's suffrage to Columbia University students<sup>14</sup>. A few months later, he gave a conference on women's suffrage in *The Current Events Club of Englewood*. He also participated in marches organized by the suffragist movement<sup>15</sup>. Dewey served on the first consulting committee at Hull House, an institution founded by Jane Addams in 1889<sup>16</sup>. He recognised that his faith in democracy as a way of life achieved by education was strengthened by his contact with Addams<sup>17</sup>.

The strong connection between Dewey and Addams confirms the mutually enriching relationship between feminism and pragmatism in its origins. Women at Hull House, who actively took part in the social reform of Chicago through their social and intellectual activities, found in Dewey's thinking the theoretical support which they did not find in the narrow formalism of university academia<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, the pragmatism that Dewey's

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. George Dykhuizem, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 150.

<sup>15</sup> There are more details on Dewey's participation in the suffrage movement in: Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 149-150.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jane Addams, "A Toast of John Dewey", in *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, ed. Seigfried, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Molly Cochran, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Charlene H. Seigfried, "John Dewey's Pragmatist Feminism", in *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, ed. Seigfried, 50.

professed, his consideration that theory also has a practical sense, led him to formulate his democratic ideal in view of the practices developed at Hull House<sup>19</sup>, the Institution that inspired the famous Laboratory School which he founded later.

Dewey supported a model of participatory democracy and a practical, social and emancipatory view of philosophy that brought him close to feminist ideas from the origins of his thought. In keeping with his radical democratic ideal, he believed that the emancipation of women would be achieved when the relationships of subordination with men became collaborative. Gender equality had a radical sense for Dewey, as he interpreted it as a vital principle that should guide all relationships between women and men, both publicly and privately, therefore affecting all aspects of their personality, both intellectual and emotional. He understood that the replacement of dominant relationships by equal relationships required an institutional change, but that this change was meaningless if it was not coming from a change in attitudes and personal dispositions<sup>20</sup>.

Accordingly, an educational reform designed to promote a democratic life habits between men and women was essential<sup>21</sup>. Dewey devoted several articles specifically to this topic "Letter to A. K. Parker on Coeducation" (1902), "Memorandum to President Harper on Coeducation" (1902); Is Co-education Injurious to Girls?" (1911). He believed that coeducation enhanced the working and social participation of women, i.e., it prevented their education being used solely to turn them into wives, mothers or teachers. But coeducation also meant that children would work together on common projects,

which was the way to not only promote attitudes of mutual sympathy and respect but also the critical thinking, communication of ideas and intellectual honesty which characterise scientific research<sup>22</sup>. Coeducation was the cornerstone needed to raise the social intelligence on which democracy depended.

But in addition to educational reform, the replacement of the relationships of subordination by relationships of collaboration between women and men required the transformation of all social institutions, especially marriage. Dewey states in *What I Believe?* (1930) that ideas about family and marriage were an exclusively male construction<sup>23</sup>. Consequently, the family needed to be reformed too to achieve real equality. He dedicated part of his work *Ethics* (1908) to this issue. Like feminism, he stated that the general and functional dualism of the public and private sectors set limits on personal development, on the functional effectiveness of institutions and on cooperation between women and men whose attitudes and interests conflicted<sup>24</sup>. Although he welcomed the incorporation of women into the workplace, as it provided them with financial independence, helping to correct their subordination to men, he regretted that this inclusion was not done on an equal basis. Job training for women was worse than that for men, so they could only aspire to very limited and low-paid jobs. In addition to this, the traditional idea that family care was the responsibility of women remained, so they had to combine family care with their

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Richard Bernstein, *Filosofía y democracia: John Dewey* (Barcelona: Herder, 2010), 77.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939-1996), vol. 14, 228.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 94-95.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "Letter to A. K. Parker on Coeducation", John Dewey, "Letter to A. K. Parker on Coeducation", in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1902-1996), vol. 2, 111.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "What I Believe", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930-1996), vol. 5, 276.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908-1996), vol. 5, 523-524.

job, which, Dewey stresses, was hardly rewarding<sup>25</sup>. Dewey applied the same type of change to the family institution as to other social institutions. He did not propose breaking up the family but democratically reforming it<sup>26</sup>. The main way to achieve this, Dewey thought, was through education.

Dewey's analysis of the family is particularly relevant because it allows to check the scope and limits of his feminist proposal and, therefore, of his democratic approach. The assessment of the family in *Ethics* and the methods to reform it change in *War's Social Results* (1917). Dewey proposes that marriage should remain "as it is" instead of being democratically transformed as suggested in *Ethics* and that women should "abdicate" their public and employment status upon marriage to facilitate soldier's reintegration into civil life. Instead of looking for a way to reintegrate men while supporting the emancipation of women, Dewey maintains the male hegemony in case of conflict of interest.

Dewey had an enormous confidence in intelligence and its complement, education<sup>27</sup>. Although it is true that, as Bernstein emphasised, he did not dismiss the conflicting aspects of American democracy<sup>28</sup>, he did believe that the main procedure for attaining democratic progress was extending social intelligence through education. As a result, he did not analyse the influence that unconscious aspects of personality have on the direction of intelligence and behaviour nor their role in the

perpetuation of prejudice. He also did not analyse in depth, as Seigfried indicated<sup>29</sup>, the social force of prejudice and the factors that contribute to its continuity. He only devoted two articles to this topic, *"Racial Prejudice and Friction"* (1922) and *"Contrary to Human Nature"*. According to Dewey, force of habit leads us to "naturalise" what actually has a social origin, for example, the subordination of women. In this sense, the feminist analysis of the factors which preserve sexist habits and gender prejudices provides depth and allows us to complete deweyan criticism.

### **The Deweyan interpretation of communication and its contributions to feminism**

After the well-known linguistic turn of philosophy, most of the current political theories recognise dialogue as a process of democratic legitimation. In the field of contemporary feminism, the importance of communication and shared interest are also highlighted in order to move towards a democracy in which women participate with their own voice.

Despite the emphasis on dialogue as a normative process, its meaning varies among different feminist currents of thought, causing dilemmas which Dewey's empirical naturalism allows to illuminate.

Feminist discourses relating to dialogue as a normative process are profuse. I will use two of them: the politics of difference proposed by I. Young and cosmopolitanism advocated by S. Benhabib. Both derive from discourse ethics: they conceive dialogue as a process of legitimation and support the recognition of the equal dignity of participants and the free expression of their interests as its constitutive principles<sup>30</sup>. However, they differ in their interpretation of dialogue. This disparity

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908-1996), vol. 5, 528.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908-1996), vol. 5, 536/529.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939-1996), vol. 14, 227.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Cochran, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, 297, 298.

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Seigfried, *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Iris M. Young, *Intersecting Voices, Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 49.

expresses and summarises some of the dilemmas of contemporary political theory.

Young's post-structuralist proposal<sup>31</sup> highlights the importance of social and cultural contexts that shape the personality of the individuals involved in policy dialogue and which underlie the dialogue itself. As a result, respect for the dignity of the members in the debate involves respecting their cultural conditions which must be recognised and expressed. Consistent with this approach, Young proposes a politics of difference aimed to the recognition and expression of traditionally oppressed groups<sup>32</sup>.

Benhabib believes that democracy is characterised by individuals having the opportunity to thoughtfully determine the rules that guide their coexistence, instead of relying on uncritically assumed values or discriminatory practices. The equal dignity and freedom of the debate depends on all individuals having equal opportunities to participate and reasonably defend their approaches, in order to reach agreements. For this exact reason, Benhabib, unlike Habermas<sup>33</sup>, does not limit the topics that should be discussed to shared interests: the specific interests of certain groups or individuals can be discussed, and individuals involved in the debate are not previously autonomous or even have a clear awareness of themselves and others, as traditional contractualism defends, but they develop their autonomy

and reflective capacity during the course of the debate<sup>34</sup>. Young criticises Benhabib's theory of justice for not analysing the social conditions needed for individuals to be able to express their own interests<sup>35</sup>. As a result, according to Young, it justifies the social domination of those individuals who control the discursive strategies of the debate. From Young's point of view, discrimination and assimilationism are the scenarios that arise from Benhabib's democratic proposal.

Benhabib believes that the recognition of different groups proposed by Young can be discriminatory for certain individuals, for example, for women<sup>36</sup>. In fact, the attempt to reconcile general rights with traditional rights in certain multi-ethnic areas and for certain issues which are considered private, such as family, has meant that the aspects of life that most directly involved women were ruled by patriarchal regulations<sup>37</sup>. Ultimately, the excessive importance of cultural groups as determinants for individuals, according to Benhabib, is a threat to the democratic and emancipatory feminist ideal that attempts to replace uncritically assumed customs by the reflection of individuals as determinant of the guidelines that guide their coexistence<sup>38</sup>.

Benhabib and Young shared their defence of participatory democracy whose guidelines are adopted through an orderly debate for equality and freedom. However, while Young regards the groups as units of political representation, Benhabib considers the individuals. Young refers to equality and freedom of traditionally oppressed groups, without taking into account, according to Benhabib, the fact that cultural

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Young's influences include M. Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, J. Lacan, M. Foucault, J. Derrida, J. Kristeva, G. Deleuze, L. Irigaray, P. Bourdieu, T. Adorno, J. F. Lyotard and E. Levinas. Cf. Iris M. Young, *On Female Body Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8. Cf. Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 7. Cf. Young, *Intersecting Voices*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Iris M. Young, "Imparcialidad y lo cívico público", in *Feminist Theory and Critical Theory*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Valencia: Alfons el Magnànim, 1990), 116.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, *El ser y el otro en la ética contemporánea* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2006), 129.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *El ser y el otro en la ética contemporánea*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Young, *Intersecting Voices*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Seyla Benhabib, "In Memoriam Iris Young 1949-2006", *Constellations*, vol. 13, nº 4, December 2006: 442.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Benhabib includes some specific examples in: Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture* (Buenos Aires: Katz, 2006), 156-163.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Benhabib, *El ser y el otro en la ética contemporánea*, 29.

differences can be oppressive for individuals. Benhabib refers to equality and freedom of individuals, without taking into account, according to Young, the social conditions on which individuality depends, which can be oppressive. The result is that Benhabib believes that dialogue is a process for moving towards cosmopolitan rights, while Young believes that it is a method for increasing recognition of cultural and social differences and particularities.

Dewey also proposed participatory democracy based on dialogue. However, it is based neither on the individual nor on the social group, but on the transactions between the individual and the group, which constitute his experience. Accordingly, Dewey uses an empirical method in his analysis which, as I will try to point out, radicalise the democratic ideal and allows to dissolve the boundaries between other alternative democratic proposals currently under discussion.

Dewey regarded democracy as a participatory way of life<sup>39</sup>, so references to communication as support for democracy are found in most of his political writings; but it is in *Experience and Nature* where he applies his empirical method to analyse the ontological and anthropological roots of language and communication, on which he bases his idea that dialogue is a political and moral process<sup>40</sup>.

Dewey opposed the traditional, rationalist views on language, according to which it is an expression of an antecedent thought. In this regard, he stated:

"The heart of language is not "expression" of something antecedent, much less expression of antecedent thought. It is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership<sup>41</sup>".

In the traditional view of language, the ontological primacy was on the substances, which corresponded to ideas, and which, finally, are expressed in words. Dewey's starting point is concrete experience, as a relationship between individuals in a particular context, instead of the substance. In such a vital position, individuals must cooperate, coordinating their actions in order to survive. In order to cooperate, certain gestures and phenomena began to be used as symbols and signs of other phenomena and actions. Therefore, language expressions appear when certain gestures or phenomena begin to acquire a new use, a symbolic use<sup>42</sup>.

Communication, whose function and meaning is participation, is instrumental and final, according to Dewey<sup>43</sup>. It is a procedure which, through its symbolic representation, makes all past events available, saving us from the tyranny of the present and giving us the ability to imaginatively rearrange the experience. But it is also final because it selects the aspects of the phenomena and the order of things which are regarded as valuable in a particular community, on which depends the development of our personality, our way of perceiving, feeling and acting.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy", in *Early Works of John Dewey 1882-1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1888-1996), vol.1, 240.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925-1996), vol.1, 4.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925-1996), vol.1, 141.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Sidney Hook, *John Dewey. Semblanza intelectual*, (Barcelona: Paidós, 2000), 58.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Cf. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925-1996), vol.1, 159.

Since democracy is an ideal participatory way of life, communicative relationships are their primary means of development<sup>44</sup>. As such, Dewey's democracy takes on a radical sense because the communicative relationships which characterise it are constituents of individuality and community. Unlike other policy proposals, the deweyan starting point lies not with individuals or groups but with human transactions<sup>45</sup>, that culminate when they are communicatively ordered<sup>46</sup>.

The radical nature of dialogue and communication means that, according to Dewey, it must affect all dimensions of personality and all areas of relationships, both public and private<sup>47</sup>. In Dewey's case, dialogue cannot be reduced to a process of public deliberation. In this case, there is always a remanent deprived of justice: whether the *ethos* in which the debate is settled, which escapes Benhabib's criticism; or the functioning of the groups, which Young admits without critical evaluation<sup>48</sup>. According to Dewey, the aim is to raise interests in which everyone can participate and to which everyone can contribute, each with their specific ideas<sup>49</sup>. The procedure and way for giving reasons comes from the communication process, to which it gives an order. The

most important thing is that the process keeps on. This is achieved by promoting interest in collaborating<sup>50</sup>.

Dewey and feminism share their interest in progressing towards a participatory democracy in which women collaborate with their own voices. However, the communication on which Dewey's democracy is based has a radical sense which gives a broader scope to his proposal compared to other contemporary feminist alternatives. According to Dewey, communication serves to cooperatively give order to human experience. Through communication, both individuality and community develop. As a result, and unlike other alternatives, Dewey does not assume the ability of individuals to act autonomously, which depends on specific social and objective conditions; or groups, whose functioning depends on the rules and conduct of individuals. Dewey does, however, attach great importance to the performative character of language as communicative relationships allow a progressive and democratic transformation of personalities and communities. It therefore applies to all social relations, both public and private, and all aspects of the person: intellectual, emotional and volitive.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927-1996), vol. 2, 350.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy", in *Early Works of John Dewey 1882-1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1888-1996), vol.1, 231.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *Middle Works of John Dewey 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908-1996), vol. 5, 349.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939-1996), vol. 14, 228.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Barbara Thayer-Bacon, "Education's Role in Democracy: The Power of Pluralism", in *Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism*, ed. Hamington and Bardwell-Jones, 149/151.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939-1996), vol. 14, 230.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us", in *Later Works of John Dewey 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939-1996), vol.14, 229.

## Conclusions

Over the last two decades, a form of pragmatist feminism has been developing, especially in the USA, which is seeking mutual enrichment of both feminism and pragmatism. Feminism completes pragmatic analysis with a gender perspective, while pragmatism offers feminism a working method which sheds light on and dissolves some of the dichotomies present in contemporary feminist debate.

In this vein, it is not surprising that Dewey has been one of the pragmatists on whom the attention of feminists has been focused. Dewey maintained a personal and philosophical relationship with feminism from the beginning of his professional career. His wife, Alice Chipman, and his friend, Jane Addams, both were part of the suffragist movement. Both collaborated in his works, his wife was the director of his Laboratory School and, when Dewey was a visiting professor in China, he taught a course on suffragism and women's rights. Dewey participated in the first Board of Hull House, of which Addams was the director, and even said that Addams decisively influenced his idea of democracy as a way of life transmitted by education. While Dewey's pragmatism was enriched by the contributions of feminism during his time, his emphasis on practices as a reference to theories gave a theoretical relevance to the practices carried out by women in social institutions such as Hull House. Feminists found support in Dewey's philosophy and a theoretical justification for their practices.

After Dewey's death, American philosophy leaned toward positivism and analytic philosophy, and continental feminism went its own way. In short, the link between Dewey and feminism broke.

Thanks to the work of Charlene Haddock Seigfried, Erin McKenna, Shannon Sullivan, Judith M. Green, Barbara

Thayer-Bacon and others, the relationship between deweyan pragmatism and feminism is recovering. Dewey's pragmatism offers feminism a method for reconstructing on an empirical basis and avoiding reifications, controversial concepts in contemporary feminist debate such as subjectivity, objectivity, rationality, equality and difference. In turn, the feminist perspective gives depth to the deweyan perspective, which had paid little interest to the social powers and unconscious factors that influence behaviour and reinforce prejudice.

In the context of this Deweyan pragmatist feminism, this article presents an analysis of dialogue as a democratic process from the point of view of the Deweyan empirical method. The naturalistic and empirical interpretation of communication radicalises Dewey's proposed democracy, avoiding the criticisms relating to other democratic proposals present in the current feminist debate:

Firstly, Dewey does not understand dialogue as the result of a relationship of individuals able to act autonomously, which was of what post-modern and communitarian currents accused the liberal and critical proposals. For Dewey, individuals develop this ability over the course of their communicative relationships. However, he does not reify the social group or traditional values as determinants of behaviour either, which is of what critical and liberal feminism accuses the post-modern and communitarian alternatives. Dewey starts from human relationships, which are ordered linguistically. Language directs our experience and, therefore, both the constitution of individuality and the composition of the community depend on it.

Secondly, despite the importance Dewey places on language, he does not turn to textualism. The reference of language is experience. Relationships are aimed at cooperation and the language is used to coordinate behaviour as a joint action. It has, therefore, a practical

dimension and purpose: it can transform the experience, shaping interests and desires, and give sense to natural phenomena. Dewey's justification for language is not transcendental, but natural and functional, so dialogue is not formally reduced. In a communicative situation, semantic, syntactic, body and affective factors are intertwined and cannot be separated. As a result, in order to establish communicative relationships and dialogues, it is not necessary to disregard desires; on the contrary, the desire to cooperate and the feeling of a need to participate should be encouraged. Post-modern currents reproach the critical feminism for an univocal and rationalist view of the debate; Dewey does not say this. However, Dewey, unlike some post-modern currents, does not ignore the role that general rules have on behaviour or on the debate. Without the desire and the need to cooperate, relationships would not be established, but without intelligent organisation of the desires to cooperate and general criteria with which to evaluate the various proposals to be debated, the public space would fragment, which is of what the critical feminist currents, such as Seyla Benhabib's, accuse post-modern currents.

Thirdly, according to Dewey, communication serves to give order to and transform relationships that are constituents of personalities and communities. Therefore, and unlike alternative feminist democratic proposals, both critical and post-modern, dialogue cannot be reduced to a process of public deliberation. If this is the case, and depending on the subjects of political representation, there is always a remnant deprived of justice. This may be the social factors on which the autonomy of the participants in the debate depend, if the political subjects are individuals; or the internal functioning of social groups, if they are the groups. Dialogue must cover, in Dewey's opinion, the full range of both public and private relationships, and all provisions of the person: emotional, intellectual and volitive.

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