PRAGMATISM, METHOD AND EDUCATION: DEWEY AND RORTY ON *HOW WE THINK*

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ABSTRACT: In this article we address Richard Rorty's (1931-2007) critique of John Dewey's (1859-1952) appeal to the "experimental method". We argue that Rorty's categorical dismissal of the link between Dewey's pragmatism and his conception of method would have been either nuanced or radically different, had he seriously considered the importance that reflection on education had for Dewey. Our strategy is based on Henry Cowles' recent reassessment of Dewey's appeal to the experimental method in *How We Think* (1910 first edition, 1933 second edition) –one of his most important educational texts– where the relevant links between pragmatism, evolutionism, and method are emphasized. This historical-conceptual framework will allow us to question Rorty's reconstruction of this aspect of Deweyan philosophy both in his interpretation of *How We Think* as a text that is beset with an unsolved tension and by taking into account his defense of an approach to education that is not a systematic educational theory. Accordingly, the reasoning in this article is twofold: firstly, we argue that the conceptual tension that Rorty attributes to Dewey in *How We Think* takes into account neither the links between method and education on the one hand nor those between method and evolutionism on the other. Likewise, we emphasize that evolutionism clearly provides an anthropology that is one salient feature of Deweyan philosophy. Secondly, we set forth Rorty's reflection on education as it appears both in his educational writings and in references to experimentalism and education in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and *Consequences of Pragmatism*, to flesh out certain relevant differences but also similarities between Dewey's and Rorty's views about the role of method in education. Even though Rorty shares with Dewey a criticism of the myth of the scientific method and a similar interconnection between a general conception of education (education as *Bildung*) and democratic culture, he rejects any appeal to the method and downplays the "experimental approach" to the method that Dewey offers in *How We Think* as a "clue of unity" for the school curriculum.

Keywords: Richard Rorty, John Dewey, Method, Pragmatism, Education

Introduction and Delimitation

Although Rorty's reassessment of the figure of Dewey has always brought about controversies in the literature (Hickman, 2007; Voparil; 2014 and Margolis 2014, among others), educational topics –especially those referring to the link between education and method in Dewey– have not had an exhaustive treatment in the literature as far as we know.[1] The question of method is the main point of disagreement of contemporary pragmatists. The debate is presented as a dichotomy: either to prioritize a 'linguistic pragmatism', which overcomes the objection that Wilfrid Sellars called "the Myth of the Given", or to opt for a pragmatism that emphasizes the role of experience as a requirement for a practical context in knowledge. As usually happens, a dichotomy leaves aside nuances that could be proved fundamental. In this respect, various attempts have been made to question the reading of classical pragmatism done by linguistic pragmatists such as Rorty's (1979) and Brandom's (2011): exposing the limits of this opposition in Rorty's reading of "traditional" or "Cartesian" epistemology by appealing to novel approaches to the epistemic role of experience (Kalpokas 2014) or defending rehabilitation of the Deweyan notion of experience by pointing to its qualitative character and its impact on the notion of inquiry (Pappas 2014). However, Henry Cowles' *The Scientific Method* (2020) reveals a unique aspect related to the reflection on method: the link between the appeal to method, pragmatist philosophy, and pedagogical reflection both in its theoretical and empirical aspects. Within this framework, our interpretative hypothesis is the following: Rorty's dismissal of the link between Dewey's pragmatism and conception of method would have been either nuanced or radically different if he had seriously considered the importance that reflection on education had for Dewey. In this context, our approach is supported by Cowles' reassessment of Dewey's appeal to the experimental method in *How We Think* (1910 first

[1] As regards Dewey's works, we take as our main reference the edition directed by Jo Ann Boydston: *The Collected Works of John Dewey* (1969-2008). These are divided into *Early Works* (*EW*), *Middle Works* (*MW*) and *Later Works* (*LW*).

edition, 1933 second edition). Cowles emphasizes the links between pragmatism, evolutionism, and method and this historical-conceptual framework will allow us to challenge Rorty's reconstruction of this aspect of Deweyan philosophy.

To do that, we have divided the present article into three parts. In the first, we focus on three axes: first, we expose the concept of experimental method as it emerged from both versions of *How We Think*. Then, we point out that Dewey's appeal to the method does not involve a commitment to the "scientific method", as it is usually conceived ("the myth of the scientific method" in Cowles' terms). Finally, we set forth the links between method, experimentation, and evolutionism in *How We Think*. In the second part, we argue that the conceptual tension that Rorty attributes to Dewey takes into account neither the links between method and education on the one hand nor those between method and evolutionism on the other. Likewise, we emphasize that evolutionism provides an anthropology that is one salient feature of Deweyan philosophy. In the third part, we present Rorty's reflection on education as it appears both in his educational writings and in references to experimentalism and education in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (hereinafter PHN) and *Consequences of Pragmatism*. We point out that Rorty underestimates the vindication of an experimental approach to the method that is a fundamental aspect of the influence of Darwinism on Dewey's school curriculum. Finally, we draw some conclusions.

The appeal to method

It is almost commonplace to say that classical pragmatists have conceded (even with their nuances and differences) a crucial relevance to the results of scientific work (Bernstein, 2010). Dewey, in particular, was categorical with regard to this. In *How We Think* (here in after HWT) he defends and promotes what he calls an "experimental method" (*MW* 6, pp. 259-300), a "scientific method for experimentation" (*MW* 6, p. 300), "experimental way of thinking" (*MW* 6, p. 299) or alternatively "active or experimental method" (*MW* 6, pp. 297-8). This way of conceiving the question is for Dewey an indispensable element in defining intelligence, both at its most basic, practical, or ordinary level, and at the sophisticated level of scientific research. Although HWT is not the only text where Dewey appeals to the scientific method, it is the most characteristic due to its influential receptions in American formal education. These can be exemplified by two extremes: on the one hand the reception, linked to the "Chicago General Science Movement". It is an educational branch which Dewey himself contributed to found, devoted to introducing high school and college students to concepts of scientific *praxis*. Chronologically was the first to have an impact on the North American school environment.[2] On the other hand, HWT was a foundational text for the *Critical Thinking* movement (initiated in the 1970's), with an impact on the United States and Canada, which aimed to introduce elementary and high school students to the practice of argumentation, rescuing the Deweyan aspiration to avoid any dogmatic and unreflective belief (see Johnson, 2012). Of these two positions, the first contributed to associate Dewey with the profile of a scientist-educator interested in conveying a scientific method. For its part, *Critical Thinking* movement,

[2] The "General Science Movement in Secondary Education (which) was developed and promoted by an emerging class of professional educators who sought to offer a version of science that they believed would both excite public interest and prove useful in the everyday lives of the masses of students streaming into the rapidly expanding institution of secondary education" (Rudolph, 2005, p. 353). This led to the proliferation, especially from the second decade of the twentieth century, of General Science courses, first for university entrance exams and then for high school. The historian of American education, John Rudolph, describes the scope of this movement, particularly in Chicago, and he places *take* as a key text of the movement "The impact of *How We Think* -he holds- on the thinking and practices of the educational community was significant. In December 1910, for example, the Central Association of Science and Mathematics Teachers adopted a resolution calling for "problem solving" to become the central concern of science education" (p. 373, footnote 42).

though it did a much more charitable reading of HWT, left unaddressed aspects related to practical teaching skills, which Dewey considered crucial to his pedagogical proposal. Finally, regarding the impact of this work on the studies about the pragmatist tradition, Rorty places it as one of the central reference points against a linguistic pragmatist or a "Pragmatism without Method" (1983) (*LW* 8,1933, pp. x-xviii; Rorty,1991, p.35, n.30).

In HWT Dewey offers two definitions of the experimental method, and both arise from the contrast with what he calls the "empirical method" of thinking, which consists in the mere recognition of the conjunction of two regular events (*MW* 6, p. 297). [3] Firstly, this also called "empirical thinking" is introduced through the following example: "A says, "It will probably rain tomorrow." B asks, "Why do you think so?" and A replies, "Because the sky was lowering at sunset."" (*MW* 6, p. 293). The mere conjunction of an overcast sky in a certain cardinal point with the fact of rain, and the previous repeated confirmation of the results of such a coincidence, legitimize as correct the conclusion that tomorrow it is going to rain. However, despite being an inductively valid conclusion, this way of thinking has a shortcoming: beyond the mere conjunction it cannot explain why it is going to rain. In Dewey's words:

> He (who reasons this way) does not perceive any *connection* between the appearance of the sky and coming rain; he is not aware of any continuity in the facts themselves—any law or principle, as we usually say (*MW* 6, p. 293).

Though he acknowledges in 1910 that "Our beliefs about human nature in individuals (psychology) and in masses (sociology) are still very largely of a purely empirical sort" (MW 6, p. 294) the predominance of this kind of thinking corresponds to social practices prior to the scientific revolution of Modernity. Among further shortcomings of the empirical method are the habits that promotes: "Mental inertia, laziness, unjustifiable conservatism" (MW 6, p. 297). These habits in an educational context will be considered undesirable effects to be avoided by «critical thinking» (MW 6, pp. 238, 244) whose fostering articulates HWT. The exposition of the empirical method as a tendency implies that partly it is a practice given by nature. However, the social milieu contributes to promote those effects. Considering this, critical thinking involves discouraging "Tendencies Needing Constant Regulation" (our emphasis) (MW 6, p. 196). The role of education arises here, precisely, to contribute to such regulation in order to avoid empirical method.[4]

Reflective thought, for its part, requires the application of the experimental method to students' diverse interests, which should be taken into account and nurtured by teachers. In the prologue to HWT Dewey anticipates this:

> [T]he native and unspoiled attitude of childhood, marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and love of experimental inquiry, is near, very near, to the attitude of the scientific mind. (MW 6, p. 179)

In contrast to the empirical method, the experimental method aims at capturing "a comprehensive fact":

> Scientific method replaces the repeated conjunction or coincidence of separate facts by discovery of a single comprehensive fact, effecting this replacement by *breaking up the coarse or gross facts of observation into a number of minuter processes not directly accessible to perception.* (*MW* 6, p. 296, in italics in the original).

[3] "Belief" is one of the key terms of the pragmatist vocabulary. From Peirce's foundational text "The Fixation of Beliefs" (1877), through James' "The Will to Believe" (1896), to Dewey's "Theory of Valuation" (1939), the three main exponents of classical pragmatism referred to it in detail. In this respect, a similar path is followed by the theorizations of Peirce's and Dewey's, who replace "belief" as a basic concept of their philosophies (throughout the development of their works) by other terms, due to its unassailable mentalistic character, extremely difficult to resignify. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore, even briefly, this issue.

[4] Dewey relies here on the analysis by John Locke and Francis Bacon to point out "the main sources of error in reaching beliefs" (MW 6, p. 198). In both cases, these sources are related to the social milieu and at the same time it is taken for granted that education should promote actions to avoid such tendencies. From this, however, it does not follow that Dewey defends a Modern conception of method, as we will see throughout this essay.

Dewey accounts for this definition by appealing to a contrast. It is an observable fact that, if placed at certain height above sea level, a water pump stops working. A neophyte (following the empirical method) reports that water rises by "suction" until the pump reaches certain height, and he concludes that above that level water does not continue rising. On the other hand, a specialist –in line with an experimental spirit– breaks down the situation into "data" and poses the idea that lack of suction at a certain height is not necessarily an "anomaly" but a "variation in the conditions" under which the suction pump works. As a consequence of that, the latter can "progress". The specialist when faced with a variation in the conditions can still offer an explanation for what he/she is experiencing. Such explanation would not be possible through the empirical method since it is based on previous conjunctions of facts, not tolerating variation or novelty as in this case of the pump that, as a product of a rise in the sea level, stops working and pumping normally (*MW* 6, p. 297)

It is no coincidence, then, that the second definition of experimental method depends on the ideas of "analysis" and "synthesis". Dewey holds: "(E)xperimental thinking, or scientific reasoning, is thus a conjoint process of *analysis and synthesis*, or, in less technical language, of discrimination and assimilation or identification" (*MW* 6, p. 299, in italics in the original). This scientific habit of thinking aims to provide a "clue of unity" (*MW* 6, p. 180) to organize formal learning. This appeal to a "centralizing factor" (id) was based on Dewey's years of experience at the University of Chicago Laboratory School. This way of associating method with education is a clear example of a general conviction: scientific method should be applied to solve practical problems in ordinary life[5]. This appeal is a constant in important subsequent works by Dewey, such as *Democracy and Education* (1916) (e.g. *MW* 9, p. 5), and The *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) (1993, e.g. p. 101), in the latter case often preceded by the qualification of "new method". This treatment of method acquired a very different connotation in the reception of HWT related to General Teaching of Science. The idea held by Dewey involved a continuity between the knowledge proper to everyday life and scientific knowledge. Currently, on the other hand, the scientific method alludes to an exceptional, abstract, and privileged way of thinking (typical to expert judgments mostly different from ordinary ways of reasoning). That exceptional way does not have a correspondence in scientific practice although it does hold a certain "fascination" (Cowles, 2020, p. 2). Following Cowles' recent analysis in *The Scientific Method,* we can call this an exceptional approach to "the myth" of the scientific method according to which it is "[…] a simple set of steps that binds everything called "science" together" (Cowles, 2020, p. 1). The core thesis of Cowles' book is precisely that the idea of method, which in the nineteenth century was enriched by the reception of evolutionism (including the reception within pragmatism), was replaced by, or slid to this latter conception (Cowles, 2020, pp. 1-3).

In that slippage, as Cowles shows, the reception of HWT by the educational system resulted in a distortion of Dewey's pedagogical conception. In other words, HWT was used as a teaching text for the scientific method (in its mythical version). Thus, an enumeration where Dewey, in fact, reconstructs the process of inquiry, was taken under the idea of "a complete act of thinking" (id 237), and it was arbitrarily associated with a universal operating rule for scientific knowledge. The latter is something that Dewey decidedly did not intend (Cowles, 2020, pp. 1-2). The enumeration is the following:

> (i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its identification and definition; (iii) suggestion of its possible solution; (iv)

[5] This conviction appears recurrently in Dewey's work. Just to name two examples, this can be seen in *"The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy"* (*MW10,* p. 16) and *The Reconstruction of Philosophy* (1920) (1993, p. 101).

> development through reason of the implications of the suggestion; (iv) further observation and experimentation leading to its acceptance or rejection, i.e., to the conclusion of belief or disbelief (*MW* 6, p. 237).

This paragraph pretends to be a recapitulation of the well-known Deweyan process of inquiry and even it could be taken as a reformulation of the pragmatist conception of belief. This last attribution comes up from the use of the notions like "habit", "problem", and "control" (referring to action) in Dewey's development that is continuing with the treatment of action and thought by Peirce and James. Nonetheless this enumeration helped to fuel the "myth" of the scientific method which has not lost its relevance at present. However, attending to the HWT project¸ the result of its consolidation was the separation between scientific and ordinary reasoning. Cowles contributes to point out that this separation made invisible the contribution of Darwinian evolutionism (as the revolutionary thought matrix of the time) to the conception of mind and knowledge.

Evolutionism is an insight to understand Dewey's *permanent* need to appeal to method. Cowles wants to retrieve the bearings of that influence which, though quite evident from Dewey's texts, tends to be left. On the basis of this contribution, it is our interest to underline the incidence of the method presented in response to the demands of the educational theory. For that purpose, let us note some points of evolutionism: first of all, at the end of the nineteenth century there was a wide influence of Darwin's ideas on the post–Civil War American intellectual climate. In this context, debates arise from the publishing of *On the Origins of Species* (1859) which pave the way for the development of an experimental view of nature and a naturalization (so to call it) of both the research objects of various disciplines and of the scientific practice itself (Cowles, 2020).[6]

Dewey came to be interested in this change, to the point of devoting an article to expose the implications of Darwinism for philosophical reflection ("The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy", 1909), where he places Darwin's ideas as "latest scientific achievement" of a series oriented "to question the classic philosophy of nature and of knowledge" (*MW* 4, p.7). We could appreciate the scope of evolutionism "in laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away." (MW 4, p.3) This achievement allowed something transcendental for the interests of Dewey: to transpose from biology an experimental scheme to think about various human issues (psychological, educational, moral and political).[7] When Dewey describes this broadening, he refers to the "new scientific method" or "new logic" as a way of approaching research now also focused on human affairs.

The idea of evolution captures Dewey's interest mainly because it allows to question, from a science perspective, a certain conception of nature as eternal and immutable. At the same time, Dewey appeals to the idea of experimental method to understand two more questions from a novel perspective: on the one hand intelligence or thought, situating the mind as an evolving organ; on the other hand, knowledge as the effect of the success of theories in the intervention on the environment. In anticipating his study on the way in which the notion of method evolved between 1830 and 1910 Cowles highlights these three points in the following paragraph:

> Before any of this began, before "science" was a tool for thinking, the term was closer to something like knowledge. That is, the term signaled more content than process, an accumulation of facts and theories you could almost point to.

[6] In the final paragraphs of his book and to summarize this process Cowles speaks in terms of a "naturalization of science" as the effect of evolutionism on science (Cowles, 2020, p. 267).

[7] The paragraph by Dewey that we quoted continues as follows: "*The Origin of Species* introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge , and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion." (Dewey, MW 4, p.3).

> This stable vision soon fell apart, as science went from meaning the products of mental work to the mental work itself. This is how science came to seem less like knowledge, a category that was (and is) of little use to psychologists, and more like thinking—an embodied, organic, measurable activity. Because the sciences of mind zoomed in on such activities in the nineteenth century, and because they often did so in the language of evolutionary theory, scientific thinking came to seem more and more *adaptive*. *That is, it took on the qualities of natural selection as that account was applied to studying minds. As theories of mind changed, so did methodology. This intertwining of evolution and experiment, the back-and-forth between accounts of mental adaptation and scientific method, played out on cultural and cognitive levels at once* (Cowles, 2020, pp. 6-7 our emphasis, except for "*adaptive"*).

A year earlier, in "The Bearings of Pragmatism Upon Education" (1908-1909), Dewey had already stated that Darwin's evolutionism allows us to think of the mind as an "*an instrument or organ of successful action*" (*MW* 4, p. 180, in italics in the original) and of knowledge as a tool rather than a means of representation[8]. In Dewey's interest in practical affairs, the education of his time could be seriously modified in the light of this Darwinian milestone. He sustains that every educational conception depends on a notion of mind that articulates it. In this regard, he says:

> [s]ince one of the main offices of education is the training of mind—since, indeed, this is the only office of education when we consider mind in its organic connections with character—*a changed view of the nature and purpose of mind carries with it a very great change in educational ideas and practices*. (*MW* 4, p. 182, our emphasis).

The various notions of mind (we could say, broadly speaking, anthropological perspectives) underlying educational practices had an impact on social division. In fact, the two prevailing conceptions of the mind in Modernity had practical implications for education. Thus, for example, while empiricism fostered an education tied to manual labour for the vast majority of the popular classes, rationalism encouraged a division of labour between intellectual and practical work, considering "culture" as pure knowledge, independent of experience and action. In contrast to these two approaches, evolutionism entailed as a practical consequence an active learning not falling into dichotomies such as the sharp division between manual and intellectual labour.

Dewey understands that and given that his social milieu pose other challenges to education, evolutionism allows elaborating an appropriate view of the educational practices. Since the mind is an *evolutionary* organ, and knowledge or theories are instruments of it, among the advantages that we could enumerate of democracy, as a way of life, is that it consolidates a system whose experimental structure fits mind development or evolution.

After offering this overview of the experimental method in *How We Think*, there are three aspects that we consider important to highlight: 1) Dewey expounded an idea of method which is in line with his idea of inquiry and overall with pragmatist conception of belief; 2) in that exposition evolutionism has a remarkable influence, to the point of consolidating the idea of experimental method; 3) the reception of *How We Think* within *General Science Movement* –perhaps initiating a series of unfortunate pedagogical receptions of Dewey– distorted aspects of his pedagogy and fuelled the myth of the scientific method. Attending to these three points, we will now address Rorty's critical reconstruction of this issue in order to examine the scope of his objections and to ponder to what extent he disagrees with Dewey in his criticism of the idea of the scientific method once we highlight similarities and differences between Dewey's and Rorty's educational conceptions.

[8] In this text, moreover, for the first time Dewey explicitly ascribes himself to pragmatism. In his words: "Now the pragmatic view of mind and knowledge […] regards mind as a development and lays a great stress upon the relation between organism and the environment. But it regards the evolution of mind as a growth out of the constant tendency of life to sustain and fulfill its own functions through subordinating environment to itself rather than by passively accommodating itself to a coercion working from without. It does not regard intelligence, therefore, as merely a result of evolution, but as also a factor in guiding the evolutionary process; for it regards intelligence as an evolution of the functions of life to the point at which they can be performed most effectively. *(MW* 4, p. 180).

Rorty and his reading of *How We Think*

Richard Rorty's criticism of Dewey's experimentalism already appears in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), in the form of a generalized distrust of any claim to a privileged access to knowledge.[9] In this work Rorty relates the adoption of a privileged method of investigation to one of the expressions in which philosophy presents itself as a "mirror of reality":

> Philosophy as a discipline capable of giving us a "right method of seeking truth" depends upon finding some permanent neutral framework of all possible inquiry (…). The mind as Mirror of Nature was the Cartesian tradition's response to the need for such a framework (Rorty 1979, pp. 211-212).

However, his objections against the "exaltation of scientific method" (Rorty 1986, 17 footnote 30) are developed years later. They are concentrated in two 80s articles ("Pragmatism without Method" (1983) and "Is Science a Natural Kind?" (1988)) on the one hand and more specifically in the introduction to the second edition of *How We Think* (1933) (LW 8, 1933 (1986), pp. x-xviii) on the other[10].

Our general aim is to argue that Rorty's criticism emerges from not distinguishing in Dewey's approach to experimentalism two different aspects: 1) the criticism of the myth of the scientific method (an issue that Rorty and Dewey definitively share) and 2) Dewey's anthropological conception that includes a vindication to an experimental method. Far from being a nomenclature issue, the appeal to an experimental method that Dewey highlights and Rorty puts aside, makes room for a non-metaphysical conception where both the mind and knowledge are the result of interactions with specific circumstances or situations. Dewey and Rorty share a criticism on foundationalism and a naturalistic way of conceiving mind and knowledge.[11] However, Rorty's rejection of this experimental method can be challenged if we take into consideration the links between method, education, and evolutionism that Cowles offers. If Rorty would consider these links (above all the role of educational ideas in Dewey's enthusiasm for Darwinism) he could accept that in Dewey's perspective experimental method is a naturalistic way of talking about the mind and knowledge.

According to Rorty, the appeal to method is an antiquated feature of Dewey, which ultimately has nothing to do with confidence in scientific inquiry. In the introduction to the first volume of his *Philosophical Writings* he states:

> I took the line that the scientistic, method-worshiping side of Dewey, his constant exaltation of something called "the scientific method," was an unfortunate legacy of Dewey's youth, a youth spent worrying about the warfare between science and theology. (1991, p. 17, footnote 30).[12]

This deep division in the reading of Dewey, together with considerations about the usefulness of an idea of method in science delimit two key aspects of Rorty's reading: first, a contrast is posed between hermeneutic strategies. A dilemma arises on wheth-

[9] As we shall see below, it is inappropriate to argue that Dewey believes that there is *an* exceptional method attributable to the sciences (and in contrast to ordinary thinking) which is a pattern or model of how to reason.
[10]Dewey, *LW* 8, 1933.

[11] What the topic of myth of scientific method comes down to, for Rorty (1982b), as he points out in "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope", is that "epistemologically-centered philosophy has wanted notions of 'method' and 'rationality' which signify more than good epistemic manners, notions which describe the way in which the mind in naturally fitted to learn Nature´s Own Language" (195).
[12]This interpretative decision of Rorty's takes on such a dimension that it is the axis of radical differences with Sydney Hook (1902–1989) regarding the heritage of Dewey's philosophy. For Rorty, a contrast between his own version of Dewey and that of Hook's expresses two opposing strands regarding how to understand Dewey. Rorty himself comments that Hook described his version of Dewey as "nietszcheanized" and "irrational". That is to say, the reproach to Rorty was not only that of not being faithful to the master but also that of misrepresenting him. For his part, Rorty admits that Hook's reading is in line with the interests set forth by Dewey himself, although he considers that nowadays insisting on these ideas is useless. Though Rorty himself acknowledges that "There would have been a lot to say on both sides" (id), the "preliminary skirmishes" that he offers us in his introduction to *How We Think* allow us to understand is standpoint on the link between method and pragmatism, even if this is limited by its preliminary character, which is acknowledged by the neopragmatist philosopher (Rorty 1991, p. 17, footnote 30).

er it is appropriate to adopt certain coherence in the face of current problems and, in its name, to discard some features of an author's thought, as Rorty does with Dewey. Or, on the other hand, whether the best alternative is to rehabilitate an author's philosophy without discarding any of its elements (e.g., the idea of method). It goes beyond the scope of this paper to resolve this metaphilosophical contrast or, in other words, this contrast between ways of understanding philosophy or of doing philosophical exegesis.[13]

It is possible to question Rorty's own judgment independently of this general hermeneutical doubt. From what we argued above, the question of method raises a second question as to whether such an appeal is a *necessary* feature of Dewey's pragmatism on the one hand and the extent of this commitment, on the other. The problematic point made by Rorty is that the appeal to method pulls in a direction contrary to the pragmatist conception of mind and knowledge. Is Rorty indeed, right?

The core of the discussion is the following: with the appeal to method Dewey would be placing –in a spirit contrary to pragmatism– philosophy as a privileged point of view. Rorty has an explanation for this point that is charitable to Dewey: he believes that this ambiguity is a consequence of an excess in the role assigned to philosophy as a product of that "legacy of youth" (where Dewey needed to emphasize the role of philosophy and science vis-à-vis theology).

In contrast to this, we believe it is possible to challenge this conclusion by attending to the role of educational reflection in Dewey's pragmatism. Thus, in no way could the appeal to method in Deweyan philosophy be deemed unnecessary without partly devaluing one of its most original aspects, namely, its anthropological conception. This allows us to account for how we acquire beliefs and adopt cognitive and practical attitudes, while avoiding certain habits that hinder knowledge or successful and controlled action in the practical realm. Dewey sees this anthropology as having fundamental implications for education. Rorty does not seem to consider either the weight of this anthropological conception or its incidence in the educational sphere. On the contrary, he acknowledges in general the weight of evolutionism in Dewey's philosophy. Our point, however, is that he does not link this incidence with his interests in educational reflection, where method occupies an explanatory role as the *rationale* of a conception of teaching (i.e. "reflective thinking").

Rorty's argument, for his part, is inscribed into Dewey's exegesis. He has explicitly pointed out that, his introduction to volume 8 of the *Later Works* –which includes *How We Think*, in the second edition of 1933– is the central reference for his critique of Dewey's experimentalism (Rorty 1991, p. 17, footnote 30). This critique is the focus of discussions with Sidney Hook in "Pragmatism without Method" (Rorty, 1983) about the scope of pragmatist philosophy. Rorty proposes a pragmatism *without method*. On the contrary, Hook defends pragmatism *with method* in the spite of a naturalism in the antipodes of Rorty. Both intend to rehabilitate a certain legacy of Dewey.

One prominent edge of Rorty's interpretation is that the Deweyan conception of method would express "[t]he tension between pragmatism's conception of inquiry (in any sphere, not just in philosophy) as a response to particular historical circumstances, and the traditional conception of inquiry as the discovery of eternal "objective" truths", on the other (*LW* 8, p. x). This tension is in turn fuelled –he argues– by a practical tension concerning the "two public images" of Dewey: the image of an activist for social reformation on the one hand and of an allegedly neutral philosopher who makes contributions to various scientific disciplines on the other (id).

In Rorty's argumentation, this tension appears in the following way: he underlies a certain lack of definition

[13] Dewey himself would align with Rorty regarding how to read or approach philosophical tradition see (*MW* 12, pp. 109-109).

with respect to Dewey's own criterion for assessing Modernity. We know that Dewey criticized "The spectator theory of knowing" (in which) thought was viewed as an exercise of a "reason" independent of the body, which by means of purely logical operations attained truth" (*LW* 4, p. 195). This position can clearly be traced back to Descartes and to a certain modern conception of knowledge as the search for a method to guarantee knowledge rather than as a reflection on our beliefs, our ways of acting in experience, or of organizing ourselves in community (as it is the case of the epistemological reflections by Dewey's and classical pragmatists).

But, the idea of a method for accessing the truth is indebted to that classical epistemological view which can be related to the myth of the scientific method pointed out by Cowles. Even if the attempt to offer a method by both rationalist and empiricist thinkers cannot be considered a simplification entirely analogous to the myth of the scientific method, the modern method (like the myth of the scientific method) is presented as a rule which guarantees knowledge in an abstract way. It also differs from the idea of the experimental method as it emerges in *How We Think* by its sensitivity to a contingent view of nature and knowledge. Thus, when Rorty attributes to Dewey the modern idea of method, it is worth showing, following Cowles, that only through a forced simplification of *How We Think* can that mythical notion be attributed to that text.

In Rorty's favor we can argue that Dewey has in good consideration the ideas of some modern thinkers, particularly those related to erroneous ways of reaching beliefs (*MW* 6, pp.199-201). This explains the exaltation of the seventeenth century on a par with the defense of method. Likewise, the confusion into which Rorty falls is still based to some extent on Dewey's own claims. A certain oscillation is palpable in the text, which is well described when he says:

> [s]ometimes it seems as if Dewey is telling us that the seventeenth century discovered not only the true layout of the solar system and the laws of motion but a new method of inquiry, one with spectacular advantages over previous methods. Dewey recommends that we try this method out in areas where it has not been previously applied—that we "generalize the experimental side of natural science into a logical method which is applicable to the interpretation and treatment of social phenomena. When Dewey writes in this vein, it sounds as if he were saying "All of us, no matter whether we would prefer a more religious or a more secular culture, or whether we are politically radical or politically conservative, naturally want to use the best possible tools in our work. The method discovered in the seventeenth century is a better, unfortunately neglected, tool." (*LW* 8, p. xii).

When taking for granted that Dewey upholds the "myth of the scientific method", Rorty assumes that this contrasts sharply with Dewey's advocacy of "reflective thinking" (*MW* 6, p. 245):

> What Dewey describes as "reflective thinking" sometimes sounds like something everybody does quite naturally, something which is the common property of the ancients and the moderns, and of any reasonably literate and articulate person, no matter what his or her persuasion. But sometimes, particularly when Dewey is comparing this sort of thinking invidiously with "intellectualism" and "rationalism", reflective thinking sounds like something quite particular, something which the moderns do more of than the ancients did, something more commonly found among laboratory scientists than among medieval schoolmen, and more prevalent among liberals than among conservatives (*LW* 8, pp. xiii).

This tension is a "real problem" (*LW* 8, p. xiv). In fact, Dewey would be aware of it since he offers something halfway between "a well-defined procedure—a method in the sense of a set of directions for what to do next, something like a recipe—and a mere recommendation to be open-minded, undogmatic, critical, and experimental" (p. xiii). Such is the moral, according to Rorty, of *How We Think*.[14] After making clear that the obsession for de-

[14] Rorty adds that the same objective motivates *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (*LW* 12, 1938). It is beyond the scope of the present article to deal with this text in detail, but it is worth mentioning that there are no substantive variations between the experimentalist view of *How We Think* and the one presented in *Logic*. However, there is an important nuance: in *Logic* Dewey defends an idea of inquiry that has a direct impact on

limiting critical thinking does not annul some important considerations on Modernity (even when these are not enough to support the appeal to a method), Rorty gives his final assessment on the origin and maintenance of this sort of ambiguity in Dewey. He therefore points to a general hermeneutical appreciation:

> That attempt (i.e. offering a general method or procedure) should be viewed as an unfortunate aftereffect of the nineteenth-century philosophical vocabularies on which Dewey was raised, vocabularies which suggested that "the nature of judgment" or "of reasoning" or "of thought" or "of science" were suitable topics for "philosophical research." Dewey did a great deal to break up these vocabularies, and thus to make obsolete the idea of a discrete, permanent, range of problems which formed the distinctive subject-matter of a discipline called "philosophy" (or, for that matter, of one called "psychology"). But, like all of us, he could not question all his beliefs at once *(LW* 8, pp. xvii, xviii).

Summing up: the appeal to method expresses a tension between two opposing ways of understanding inquiry (this tension is in turn sustained by Dewey's inability to lay out his social commitment in a framework –or "vocabulary," to use the Rortyan term– that demands a certain neutrality). Rorty provides a framework to mitigate the impact of this critique by arguing that the appeal to method is characteristic of a nineteenth-century vocabulary that Dewey has not yet been able to question in the early twentieth century. This argument is accompanied by biographical consideration of the two public figures before whom Dewey himself struggles. But it is above all because of the argument (which assumes a hermeneutical position) that Rorty has no qualms about dissociating certain pragmatist commitments of Dewey, such as his conception of inquiry –which operates behind his idea of method– at the same time as the anthropological conception (linked to evolutionism) of the appeal to method.

In this approach to the tension pointed out by Rorty, first, there is no reference to the links between method and education, and method and evolutionism, not to mention, secondly, that there are few considerations in line with an educational reflection. Both issues prevent Rorty from appreciating the implications of the notion of method in *How We Think*. Although these omissions are connected to Rorty's metaphilosophical commitments, we are interested in emphasizing that his bias responds to his own educational conception. Educational reflection in Rorty, as Stefano Oliverio argues, is "suspended between the lack of a focused thematization and the recurrence of the topic in his works" (Oliverio, 2020, p. 2).

Two educational conceptions within pragmatism.

In contrast to Dewey, Rorty never has been considered a philosopher of education nor an educator. However, it's worth mentioning a broader educative project in Rorty's pragmatism going back to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). In his celebrated work, Rorty aligns himself with the humanistic tradition in education (whose main representative is Hans-Georg Gadamer) which advocates for the "[…] attempt to place objectivity, rationality, and normal inquiry within the larger picture of our need to be educated and edified" (PMN, 363). Rorty's emphasis on contingency seeks to challenge the philosophical and common sense view according to which human beings have fixed essences by promoting a romantic image of the self-creative individual. Drawing on this view, Rorty calls to reconstruct philosophy through "redescription",

the notion of method. Specifically, he denies that there are *a priori* criteria (i.e. external to the research context) for assessing knowledge. Inquiry is, according to Dewey, a process within which epistemic norms are adjusted and eventually challenged. In line with scientific *practice*, research could be characterized as a "self-corrective process" (*LW*, 12, 13). On the basis of this conception Dewey questions traditional epistemology for detaching research from a context and proposing abstract norms of epistemic evaluation. Richard Bernstein has pointed out that this argument contributes to the famous Deweyan critique of epistemic fundationalism (Bernstein, 2010: 269). Attending to this reading, it is difficult to grant Rorty his interpretation of Dewey's defence of method as appealing to a set of rules/ external to every investigative process which are ideal at one point, in line with the Cartesian conviction of a set of rules for directing the mind. Although it is true that Dewey traces a genealogy of method and situates its emergence in Modernity (pointing to Bacon as one of its cultists) (for instance in *Reconstruction in Philosophy)* it is no less true that in his description of method he always insists on the need to think in an experimental context where the norms are permanently self-correcting.

that is, "[…] substituting the notion of *Bildung* (edification, self-formation) for that of 'knowledge' as the goal of thinking" (PMN, 359); later Rorty is going to develop the idea of vocabularies as the object of that redescription. This broader project is specified in one of his educational writings dedicated to university education (i.e. "Hermeneutics, General Studies and Teaching" (1982)) where he openly links 'edification' with the Deweyan idea of 'growth' (*MW* 9, pp. 46): he urges us to see "[…] the goal of inquiry and of life not as getting in touch with something which exists independently of ourselves, but as *Bildung*, self-formation, what Dewey liked simply to call 'growth'" (Rorty, 1982 p. 3).

Strictly speaking, Rorty devotes a few texts to education (Rorty, 1982, 1990, 1990b, 1999; Rorty, R., & Ghiraldelli, P., Jr. 2008) and this sampling of writings offers some pedagogical guidelines that allow us to infer certain distinctive characteristics of how a pedagogy should be oriented, from primary schooling levels to higher education. Ramón Del Castillo (2014) summarizes Rorty's educational tenets as follows:

> For Rorty, education, from elementary school to higher education, should focus on the development of two impulses: on the one hand, that of sociability, and on the other, that of individuality. The former is based on the inculcation of common values and virtues such as solidarity, loyalty, and hope. The latter impulse, on the other hand, has to do with the inculcation of self-love, with the desire for freedom, and taste. (Del Castillo, p. 85).

This cluster of educational writings promotes at least three theses: i) educational purposes mark a kind of contrast between lower (primary and secondary) education and higher education; ii) these purposes draw a sentimental education focused on promoting certain feelings and the identification with others throughout imagination as a means to guarantee a democratic *ethos*; iii) the relevancy of linguistic education is twofold. On the one hand education should be oriented towards the reading of appropriate narratives (particularly novels featuring heroes who express the values to be instilled). On the other hand, at the highest schooling levels, the aim of education should be oriented to students modifying the vocabulary they use to express themselves in order to question certain aspects of their tradition (a tradition that they have received in a more or less dosed or unquestioned way during schooling) (Del Castillo, 2014, p. 95). Furthermore, Rorty expresses a major concern for the role of university education in contemporary societies that is not as prevalent in Dewey's educational reflection (Rorty, 2022). In these texts on university education (concretely "Education without Dogma" (1990), "Demonizing the Academy" (1995), and "American Universities and the Hope for Social Justice" (2001)) Rorty criticizes certain leftist political activism that highlights the necessity to preserve social identities instead of pointing out social and economic inequalities.[15]

At the core of Rorty's educational view, we find the concern for fostering a democratic *ethos*. Nonetheless, it starts from a kind of "protectionism" about truth that merits debating to what extent it is appropriate to promote heroic figures or events in order to guarantee values such as hope (ii). Regarding this point, a Rortyan thesis derived from (ii) is that education, as socialization, should not be oriented towards questioning what is considered true, but it should merely transmit it.[16]

This controversial engagement can be justified by how Rorty defines 'sentimental education'. He describes

[15] This without mentioning Rorty's criticism of a small group (a radical 2 percent) to foster "leftist political indoctrination" (Rorty, 2022 p. 95) by promoting, for instance, "compulsory undergraduate courses that would "sensitize students to cultural differences"" (Rorty, 2022 p. 91). Regarding this, Rorty explains "There is a big difference between offering a tempting smorgasbord of courses designed to help students grasp what the strong have been doing to the weak, and telling them that they must take such courses" (p. 91).

[16] In current social epistemology there is a debate between two factions about the epistemic aims of formal education. One faction affirms that the epistemic aim is truth (to instruct in true beliefs without giving relevance to justification, which is similar to the Rortyan approach regarding socialization) while the other faction states that the end of formal education must be justification (associated in this case with the idea of critical thinking). The absence of references to Dewey by both factions of this debate is striking. See Marabini & Moretti 2020 for further reference to this issue.

it as "[…] manipulating sentiments in such a way that [people] imagine themselves in the shoes of the despised and oppressed" (Rorty 1998, p. 179). Hence sentimental education points to promote both individual and communal growth.[17] On the other hand, it implies a centrality of language as the object of learning (ii and iii). This commitment is a marked point of disagreement for Dewey who understood that for empirical reasons the earlier stages of thinking (school period) require an experimental method of learning: learning by doing in the context of characteristic occupations (communitarian tasks). According to Dewey if we do not promote a practical engagement at the beginning of our education we risk to lose contact with practical interests without mentioning "[l]ack of interest in study, habits of inattention and procrastination, positive aversion to intellectual application, dependence upon sheer memorizing and mechanical routine with only a modicum of understanding" (*MW* 6, pp. 227,228). Moreover, Dewey mentioned the tendency to oppose technical and humanistic education as an effect of prioritizing the teaching of books over the development of practical skills in school period.

Although Rorty does not say nothing against Dewey's experimentalism as a method of learning he overlooks Dewey's experimentalism in terms of a method of learning in the school period. Dewey considered that to focus education on books in earlier stages of thinking was one of the best vices of the traditional school. Even though this Deweyan project has been criticised for many conceptual and empirical reasons, it is still a crucial part of his philosophy of education and is totally absent of Rorty reconstruction. Rorty does not charge Dewey with the idea that his model of education is at odds with the fostering of propositional knowledge neither. However, the appeal to method is a fundamental element in Dewey's pedagogy if we take seriously the anthropological conception of learning according to which in earlier stages of thinking is convenient to favour practical skills and in a later period it is convenient to foster the learning throughout books (i.e. propositional knowledge). This ambitious idea of Dewey's pedagogy is presented in HWT as the core of his experimentalism. Regarding other differences, although Dewey, like Rorty, associated education with socialization, the former did not mark a diversification between lower and/or higher education. Considering Deweyan conviction that certain spontaneous tendencies in children resemble the scientific spirit (*MW* 6, 228), it could be thought that in Dewey that differentiation is unfeasible: education seems to have one and the same trajectory from the first educational levels signed by reflective thinking. For instance, Dewey considers that the principle that educational instruction "out of the needs and opportunities of activities engaged in by the students themselves" (*MW* 4, p. 187) is realized at the initial level as well as in scientific laboratories, its aim being to introduce it into the rest of the levels (primary and secondary). Despite his reflections on language and the role of judgments and concepts, Dewey does not give this principle the centrality that Rorty does, which can be seen in his emphasis on the notion of "vocabulary" –which he briefly introduces in (Rorty 1989).[18]

While Dewey offers an idea of *how* to educate (a way of thinking that is convenient or correct for education), Rorty not only does not take a stand on the matter but, on the contrary, he distrusts the possibility of speaking about a correct way of thinking from a pragmatist approach.[19] This is the most relevant contrast between

[17] As Abellanosa (2020) suggests, for Rorty education also "is a communal enterprise, a process which every individual must be involved in and take responsibility. Truth is shared end every member of the community should be involved in the process of finding it" (100). Additionally, Good and Garrison (2014) note that Dewey's understanding of democracy likewise rests on the idea that "if we wish to grow, we must interact cooperatively with otherness and difference, not just tolerate them" (p. 62).

[18] On this relevant notion in Rorty's work see Santelli 2020.

[19] It's true that Rorty would accept the idea of 'a correct way of thinking' if the epistemic status of standards at stake remains internal to inquiry. However, he would not accept that this correct way is a result of a philosophical reflection on the issue (in this case a conception of learning). For Rorty this is to go too far. Rorty emphasized, more emphatically, from the 90's onwards

each other. The reasons for this reticence are directed in principle to an antiquated form of philosophical projects. We reckon that the difficulty in linking the method with reflective thinking stems partly from this point. Rorty does not disagree with the habits of reflective thinking but considers that these cannot be the product of a philosophical theory on the nature of thought (such as the one that Dewey would supposedly offer). Dewey's metaphilosophical conviction is that pragmatism can be considered as a provider of "working hypothesis in educational theory" (*MW* 7, p. 329) nonetheless. Rorty (1990b), in a text where he warns against the temptation of philosophizing in education, sustains that "[i]nsofar as philosophy has a social function, it seems to me a therapeutic one - helping people get out from under outdated philosophical ideas" not "the suggestion of new, concrete alternatives" (p. 41). This last role should be carried out by education and politics (and philosophy is neither of both). Such hypotheses on the other hand would not so much make up a pure theory as a contribution within an interdisciplinary weave where empirical contributions both shape and ratify such hypotheses. *How We Think* is a concrete example of such a reflection. To the extent, therefore, that the offering of a working hypothesis can be distinguished from the defence of a pure theory, we believe that this metaphilosophical questioning (i.e. 1) does not fully conform to Dewey's conception. On the other hand, even if an educational reflection such as Rorty's may be composed of general guidelines, these must be carried out in a particular context (i.e. the school). An interesting question arises at this point, namely: Can a pragmatist conception provide tools to expound a conception of learning? Is Rorty's refusal to offer a view in this respect justified beyond whether we ascribe to him an interest in doing so? Whereas Dewey considers that it is necessary to offer a theory of how we think which organizes schooling, Rorty understands that this is an excess (Rorty 1990b). But is there a way to expose this difference that does not place Dewey as committing something like an excess, such is Rorty's accusation? Rorty thinks there is not. We think that there is.[20]

The defence of method in Dewey corresponds to the attempt to expound a certain anthropological conception strongly tied to evolutionism. This is supported, in the first place, by the analysis done by Cowles, who sees that in the approach to the experimental method of *How We Think* the attempts to transfer to the practical field (education, in this case) the evolutionist view of knowledge and the mind. On the other hand, Dewey himself around the time of *How We Think* justifies his reliance on pragmatism, in fact, by appealing to the experimental view provided by evolutionism. An additional element that we emphasize is the relevance that evolutionism assumes for education, which is consigned in "The Bearings of Pragmatism Upon Education" (1908-1909)" (*MW* 4, pp. 181-182). This anthropological conception makes it possible to provide a framework for educational theory. Regarding this, Dewey acknowledges not being original. He assumes that just as education depended for decades on

that the role philosophy is mostly "therapeutic" (1990b, p.41). On the other hand, when Dewey promotes a theory of inquiry he is thinking in terms of a kind of experience that provides epistemological value to the process of inquiring. So, even though Rorty shares the Deweyan idea that the epistemic criteria are internal to the process of inquiry, the context of research does not include experience as a relevant future. We would like to thank to one of the anonymous referees for let us note this objection and for his/her helpful comments and suggestions on a previous version of this paper.

[20] This contrast merits further treatment of Richard Rorty's "conversational" conception since it involves a series of points that ultimately converge on the question of what constitutes an epistemic community and what boundaries it establishes. Presumably Rorty's answer on the latter point does not lead to the idea of an ultimate justification or a normativity prior to the internal practices of a community. It is precisely the idea of "method" what causes Rorty's rejection because of this aseptic connotation. However, we believe that following *How We Think* Dewey's pretension does not deviate from Rorty's interests. Where, then, does the difference lie? Why does Rorty not accept the postulation of a method as a way of thinking better than another in order to forge an educational conception? Our hypothesis is that Rorty considers that any serious epistemic practice is acquired during the process of individualization (a moment in which humanistic education is prevalent) which is subsequent to the teaching phase on which Dewey focuses (i.e. at the primary level when experimentalism is the element articulating educational practices). Of course, it would be worthwhile to go deeper into this point in another article (see Waks, 1997).

rationalist and empiricist conceptions of the mental, his time required a different conception which evolutionism fitted. Among the data that demanded a new education stood out the budding democracy, in which Dewey had a special interest. The experimental view in education contributed to a democracy conceived not as a mere regime among others, but as the regime that would allow developing the powers or capabilities of the mind.

Dewey, thus, represents an example of an empirically informed philosophy in which the conceptual task must be supplemented and adjusted by appropriate experimental research (Bernstein, 2010, 23). From this position a general concept of learning can be offered without reverting to the privileged place, well-delimited by Rorty, of an exceptional vocabulary. In the case of an educational theory, Dewey considers that school could work as an experimental laboratory to test different proposals for educational practices based on evolutionary psychology and biology. When he wrote *How We Think* Dewey had already carried out this experimental task for nearly a decade (Martin, 2002: pp. 203-210). To some extent, he configures a naturalism within which the idea of how we think does not appear as a mere speculation but it is based on a recent scientific impact and provides a response to a given social context. For all of the above, in short, it is possible to avoid the Rortyan conclusion that the Deweyan method is nothing more than a secular battering ram against the still influential presence of theology. Instead, method is a contribution to offer a general idea of learning, as a hypothesis, to an educational theory that can be extended and reconfigured in the light of new data.

Two further clarifications should be made about the relationship between Dewey and Rorty. Firstly, Rorty's metaphilosophical views are not necessarily influential in his educational writings. Even though Rorty says that educational reflection should avoid the temptation of Theorizing (with a capital T as philosophy would be the Mother of Sciences or the last word of any valid knowledge), there is no implication between Rorty's metaphilosophical ideas and his ideas about educational practices. However, in this section, specific links between Rorty's philosophical project and his educational conception have been pointed out. Secondly, beyond this remarkable differentiation about the appeal to method, we could find points of commonality shared by Dewey and Rorty about democratic education (understood as a general socialization process) and inquiry. We will see that Rorty gives a similar function to a 'democratic culture' than Dewey if we include those similarities that aim to avoid dogmatism and social division. Curiously, this similarity is explained by shared conviction: on the one hand, philosophy can intervene positively in public affairs. Social reform as a concept could get perfectly closer to the conception of "philosophy as cultural politics" that Rorty defended from the 1980s on and which gives title to the fourth volume of his *Philosophical Paper*s (2007). Indeed, Rorty understood his commitment to cultural politics as the last step of his effort to reassess the "celebrations of American democracy, naturalism, and social reconstruction" he linked with the "heroic period of Deweyan Pragmatism" (Rorty 1982b, 64, 61). Regarding this, the examples he offers in that last volume of collected papers point out the constructive or positive role he envisioned pragmatist philosophy playing –e.g. "proposals for new roles that men and women might play", "sketches of an ideal community", "social hopes, programs of action, prophecies of a better future", etc. (Rorty 2007 ix,x).[21]

Although Dewey's reformist interest is more far-reaching than Rorty's cultural politics, the truth is that this reformist conviction cannot be reduced to an exceptional or privileged role intended for philosophical research. The difference is that conceptual research in Dewey might go hand in hand with scientific experimentation and aim at an interdisciplinary construction. There is no theory without this empirical and constructive com-

[21] Koopman (2013), *inter alia*, has empashized this positive conception of cultural politics.

ponent. The role that Rorty assigns to philosophy is more modest, even without losing sight of its practical impact. If Dewey were willing to give prescriptions without appealing to the scientific background, Rorty's accusation would be better justified. But that is not the case. The only point Rorty could still appeal to is that while having the function of being an empirically informed reflection, the Deweyan notion of philosophy is still very ambitious. On this last point, it would be difficult to think of a Deweyan counter-objection other than the realization that for the purposes of intervening in public spheres theory is necessary as an operational foundation (so to speak) –the idea of "a clue of unity" of the practices (*MW* 6, p. 180). In the case of education, for instance, it is difficult to conceive of an educational theory that does not consider some kind of grounding along these lines. In "Texts and Lumps" (1985) Rorty vaguely approaches this point by indicating that the insistence on method is based on the confusion between a " pedagogical device –the device of summarizing the result of the one's own narrative in dense little formulas– and a defence of a method for discovering the truth" (Rorty, 1985, p. 76). Dewey would have subscribed to this idea and would add that the method comes from experimentation in the classroom by paying attention to how students learn. Undoubtedly, he would have had no problem calling 'method' to the "summary" in question.

Conclusions

In this paper we have addressed a certain historical-conceptual core that is consolidated in the appeal to method of *How We Think*. Thus, in the first part we have pointed out the links between method and evolutionism and method and education. We have emphasized the way in which Cowles shows the influence of evolutionism in *How We Think*. We have shown that Dewey, in this context, takes care of showing the consequences of pragmatism for education by appealing precisely to this evolutionary framework. We have also set forth the defence of "reflective thinking" as a result of the delimitation of a way of thinking that arises from the Deweyan conception of inquiry and the pragmatist conception of belief: given certain tendencies and habits that need regulation and attending to the demand for an education for democracy, the appeal to method is a more than possible resource to guide an education within the formal system. In our reconstruction, the influence of Darwinian psychology is a fundamental insight to understand Deweyan educational theory.

In the second part, we have examined Rorty's critical reconstruction of the appeal to method. Faced with the questioning that the exaltation of the scientific method is nothing more than a nineteenth-century sequel of a philosophical scheme, we argued that such a reading is limited by not attending to the two relations specified in the preceding section. In this part, we have complemented Cowles' analysis by reconstructing the educational interests which were visible in Dewey by the time of *How We Think*.

This allowed us to neutralize Rorty's claim that method is a legacy from Dewey's youth. Besides, we argue that this neutralization has consequences for the scope of educational theory by giving rise to two different educational conceptions within the pragmatist tradition. Our critique aimed at questioning Rorty's objections arising from his educational approach: on the one hand (1) the idea that the role of philosophy should be only therapeutic and that a philosophy approach that provides a conception of learning as Dewey does in *How We Think* goes too far. On the other hand, (2) even though Rorty understands Dewey's criticism of certain classical conceptions in epistemology and the Deweyan interconnection between education and democratic culture, his rejection of the epistemic role of experience impedes him from positively valuing Dewey's experimentalism. This, in turn, has two specific consequences: on the one hand, Rorty appropriately rejects the idea of the myth of the scientific method but he considers that a systematic theory on inquiry or learning is an

excess for philosophical rejection. On the other hand, he underestimates experimentalism as a method of learning and this is one fundamental aspect of Deweyan naturalistic philosophy as expressed in *How We Think*.

Finally, the contrast we have presented between Deweyan pedagogy and Rorty's pedagogical guidelines acquires relevance in view of the discussions on how to guide education of our time. At first sight, these demands seem contradictory. On the one hand professionalization of future workers for a system that proposes mastery of increasingly technical and specialized means, but on the other hand without an education that contributes to democracy, a formative instance (perhaps the only one) is lost to avoid dissolution of the public space, of political communication and participation. And these elements are objects demanded by society when the consequences of the economic model of life (growing inequality, environmental impact, authoritarian and/or fascist attitudes channelled in formal democracy, etc.) are exhibited. In the tension between these two postulates there is a question: how to reach a sustainable position without losing sight of the worth-considering aspects of each claim? Following Martha Nussbaum (2012) in the main developed countries an "education for profit" has consolidated, which places technique as a knowledge attached to the material conditions that define social development, but in an unreflective way. In our milieu and at a regional level (south America), what is conceived as 'critical education' is often reluctant to consider the discussion of an interesting sense of an education for work. In this case, the emancipatory factor is given priority in a political key that prioritizes aspirations for change but approaches labour or technical demand with a sometimes unwavering suspicion (De Sousa Santos, 2019). In contrast to this, we understand that Dewey's educational philosophy offered a way of linking democracy and technical development in a sense applicable to our time. The acknowledgement of this link has been defined by Dewey as "radical liberalism" (*LW* 11, 45) and it represents a system that is equidistant from both the bold liberalism of *laissez-faire* (*LW* 11, pp. 282-288) and the dogmatic doctrines of "Soviet socialism" (*LW* 9, 91-96). By his side, in his later political writings, Rorty shows a concern for the crucial role that the university could have in making feasible the link between humanistic education and economic development. However, the appeal to method, against this background, is a necessary limit to guarantee a democratic education in the school curriculum that fosters a kind of thinking that allows to sustain the democratic system itself and to deepen it, so that the democratic ideal becomes less of an ideal and more of a reflective *praxis.*

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