

John Dewey: the search for a rhetoric pedagogy*¹

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Abstract

The starting point of this paper is a controversy that has involved the philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859-1952) since the last century: both authors contrary and favorable to his theses consider his educational conceptions associated with skepticism, a philosophical movement created by Pirro de Élis (360-270 BC). This controversy is investigated in this paper through the rhetorical analysis proposed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, comparing Dewey's discourse with the pyrrhonic formulations. This investigation results in the discovery of some similarities and an important difference between the discourses examined. This difference, in turn, leads to the examination of a philosophical movement prior to Pyrrhonism, the sophistry, with Protagoras of Abdera (490-421 B.C.) as its main representative. Sophistry is analyzed in this work according to contemporary authors who diverge from the traditional characterization instituted by Plato. The conclusions identify important coincidences between the Deweyan discourse and the Sophistic discourse, which allows Dewey to be associated with the rhetorical discursive tradition and to position his educational proposals within the scope of rhetorical pedagogy. This pedagogy proposes to lead students to compose and express their personal inclinations, not in the narrow space of individual life, but in the broader horizon of the community, through methods that aim to project the student in the public space of deliberation and action.

Keywords

John Dewey – Pyrrhonism – Sophistry – Rhetoric.

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Introduction

Our starting point is a controversy that began in the last century and is still present today: between favorable and unfavorable evaluations, John Dewey's (1859-1952) educational conceptions are characterized by some analysts as skeptical. The first section of this work will be dedicated to exposing this debate, while the second will seek to examine the consistency of the referred characterization, analyzing one of the philosopher's most important works, *The quest for certainty* (DEWEY, 1929).

The following section will make a comparative study of Dewey with the formulations of the creator of skepticism, Pirro of Elis (360-270 B.C.), as recorded by Timon of Phlius (325-235 B.C.) and consolidated in the work *Pyrrhonian hypotyposes*, by Sextus Empiricus (1997), a thinker who lived between the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Christian era and is considered an essential reference for the study of this area.

To examine the feasibility of classifying Deweyan ideas as belonging - or at least similar - to Pyrrhonian skepticism, we will use the resources of rhetorical analysis, a methodology derived from Perelman's work (PERELMAN, 1982; PERELMAN, 1999; PERELMAN; OLBRECHTS-TYTECA, 2002), one of the most prominent representatives of the contemporary movement to review Aristotle's work (BERTI, 1997; MAZZOTTI, 2007).

This methodology allows investigating printed discourses as argumentative pieces that aim to order the audience's reasoning with a view to persuasion, a major objective of rhetoric. The discursive strategies of a given author can be compared to others, without resorting to ideological or moral judgments. In this paper, we will approach *notional dissociation*, an argumentation technique that establishes hierarchies between concepts, expressing a view of the world through criteria of interpretation and structuring of the real. The discourse articulated in such way begins with the formation of antithetical pairs, so-called because one conceptual term is opposed to another; after the concepts are hierarchized, *philosophical pairs* are formed, in which Term II is presented as a norm before Term I, then qualified as illusory, erroneous, apparent.⁴

The rhetorical analysis will allow us to identify Dewey and Pirro's *discursive landmarks*, without this implying reducing the ideas of one to ideas of the other.⁵ Our aim is to highlight aspects that are common to both, without neglecting any differences. The last section of this work will be articulated in response to the identification of a sensitive divergence between the two thinkers, which will require examining a philosophical movement prior to Pyrrhonism, the sophistry, represented by Protagoras of Abdera (490-421 B.C.). In line with contemporary interpretations of the Sophist movement, we will qualify the Deweyan conceptions as belonging to a tradition of thinking, in which the proposal for a *rhetorical pedagogy* is developed.

4- About this topic, see chapter IV of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2002).

5- Silva (2013) calls *discursive framework* a characteristic way of approaching and solving philosophical problems, a typical way of organizing discourse.

John Dewey in the spotlight

John Dewey's ideas have been the subject of controversy in Brazil since the 1930s, at least, when the conceptions of the New School movement spread. The debate goes beyond the pedagogical scope, focusing on the philosophical bases of the Deweyan thinking, which are part of the movement called Pragmatism, of which Dewey was one of the founders along with C. S. Peirce (1839-1914) and W. James (1842-1910). The first negative appraisals of the New School and, in particular, of Deweyan philosophy arose between the 1930s and 1950s through Catholic intellectuals, the main opponents of that movement (CUNHA; COSTA, 2006).

Several authors contributed to spread the thesis that the new pedagogy was without ends, being a set of educational procedures not always proven in practice. This appreciation indicated that the new pedagogical ideology had harmful consequences, not only in the school sphere, but also in the broader social sphere (COSTA, 2005). In this interpretative line, Dewey appears as incapable of providing solid moral principles, being responsible for emptying the educational process (CUNHA; COSTA, 2006).⁶

Currently, it is possible to find evaluations that credit to Deweyan pragmatism the direct or indirect responsibility for the devaluation of educational theories and for the exchange of theoretical certainties widely established by mere practicalism. Libâneo (1996, p. 112) suggests that the origin of the problem lies in the disfigurement of the proposal for a "unitary" pedagogical science and in the incentive to replace the philosophy of education with a shallow scientist view. Authors involved in criticizing the educational implications of the "neoliberal model of society", such as Saviani (1997, 1980) and Duarte (2000, 2001), believe that the proposals of the New School and Dewey's influence opened the way for a spontaneous-based pedagogy, and children should discover the world on their own.

Saviani (1996, p. 176-177) characterizes the pragmatist educational philosophy as a movement that governs the educational process in an "unreadable" way, since it is permeated by a certain "mistrust in reason". By adopting experimental bases, instead of establishing the "essential unity between theory and practice", the referred philosophy would contain the potential dissolution of "theory in practice". Among the causes of the "retreat of theories" in view of the value of practices and experiences centered on the individual, Moraes (2003b, p. 153) situates the pragmatist conception as a propeller of "knowing how to do", by classifying the theories as a "waste of time or metaphysical speculation".

Several similar positions, both within and outside the area of education, could be mentioned as representative of questions about the Deweyan thinking. An equally significant volume of evaluations follows another direction, arguing that Dewey's philosophical conceptions, as well as his contributions to educational renewal, correspond to a valuable moral undertaking and that, having to delve into the author's political

6- In the 1950s, the *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Pedagógicos* published several articles in which Dewey appears associated with a spontaneous pedagogy, contrary to the planning of the teaching work (CUNHA, 1999b, p. 51).

reflections, with special attention to the ethics implications inherent to their notion of democracy (JOHNSTON, 2006; PAPPAS, 2008).

From the set of favorable analyzes, we highlight Hansen (2007, p. 25-26) for whom the education proposed by Dewey concerns “moral knowledge” that encompasses “a feeling of justice, freedom and virtue” that underlies academic knowledge in the “lasting feeling of its consequences for human life”. The Deweyan work encourages the learning of “all contacts in life”, which is understood as a “moral life” achieved through the “art of democracy” (HANSEN, 2006, p. 184-185). Dewey inspires a “teaching poetics”, which instrumentality consists in recognizing, in “epistemic, moral and aesthetic terms”, the value of metaphors for the enrichment of research and educational work (HANSEN, 2005, p. 107). Education becomes a process with no “final and unwavering definition”, sharing a continuous search for the truth (p. 123).

According to this understanding, Deweyan elaborations do not lead to a split between education and moral formation (CUNHA, 2001a). On the contrary, they encourage the construction of new means to transmit values and knowledge, promote the dissemination of socially accumulated experience and integrate individuals into the democratic community (CUNHA, 2005). Dewey does not deny the existence of “world regulatory principles”, but considers them dependent on “social circumstances and associative experiences”, which makes the affirmation of immutable values inconceivable (CUNHA, 2008, p. 175). To Dewey, there are normative principles, but they cannot be definitively ensured, as reality is in “permanent movement” (CUNHA, 2001a, p. 97). In this changing environment, the truth is always a provisional response to the search for moral and ethical criteria and values (CUNHA, 1999a, p. 83).

The most complete expression of positions unfavorable to the New School and contemporary pedagogy, as well as in relation to Dewey, is found in Moraes (2003b, p. 154), to whom the heart of the problem lies in the acceptance of an “epistemological skepticism” which, widely disseminated, causes the “theoretical degradation” that is observed today: a “practice without reflection”. Prevails a way of thinking that “rules out the need to inquire about truth, objectivity or what would be a correct interpretation or apprehension of reality” (MORAES, 2003a, p. 174).

To characterize Dewey as a skeptical philosopher is not surprising, considering that, as Pappas (2008, p. 6) points out, Pragmatism is usually seen as disconnected from normative ethical principles, receiving denominations such as “ethical skepticism” and “ethical relativism”. Such a characterization does not imply a negative judgment of the Deweyan theses, since, to Dewey, knowledge does not, in fact, require “transcendental truths”, once “convincing or probable truths” are established; the mind is not an “instance of representation of the real, like a faithful mirror of the world”, but a source of provisional certainties that enable effective actions based on “beliefs about the real”, which is sufficient to plan “the change of the current order” (p. 56).

Following this line of analysis, Deweyan skepticism would not be responsible for disorders, but a wealth of healthy innovations; instead of losses, bewilderments and insecurity, we would have a new and promising way of defining education, understanding that educational purposes do not need a definitive and immutable plan, since we can

discuss them by consensus during the investigation itself, without resulting in the impoverishment of agents and school content. Indispensable for this process to happen is the existence of a truly democratic environment, the only one that allows and generously welcomes divergence (CUNHA, 2006; CUNHA, 2008).

Dewey and the search for certainty

The suggestion of associating Dewey with skepticism requires an accurate investigation of his works, of which we highlight *The quest for certainty* (DEWEY, 1929), a work that fits the theme now examined because it was elaborated with the purpose of “refuting the philosophical search for certainty”, considering that “no thing, end or essence is eternal, immutable or necessary” (GARRISON, 2006, p. 19).

A central feature of the Deweyan philosophy is the strong opposition to conceptions that seek to be grounded in something that is supposed to precede existence. Contrary to the movements of thinking that claim that there is a sphere of the real composed of essences transcendent to existential relations, with which we can reach ultimate and unequivocal truths, Dewey argues that the objects we want to know are examined in the field of relationships built by men in their practices, which are the result of intelligently directed operations and can be evaluated by their results.

In *The quest for certainty*, the defense of this thesis involves proposing that the investigative method of experimental sciences be expanded to the field of moral judgments, which implies a profound change in the criteria we use to understand moral and evaluative knowledge. Dewey (1929, p. 313) affirms that it is necessary to reflect on “needs congruent with the present life” and “to interpret the conclusions of science in relation to their consequences on our beliefs regarding purposes and values”.⁷

The argumentative axis of *The quest for certainty* is the defense of the instrumental function of philosophy in the search for solutions to human problems. Dewey (1929, p. 24) sees philosophical thinking as decisive in the “construction of the good”, which is achieved through reflection on the problems of humanity, reconciling “the conclusions of natural science with the objective validity of the values by which men live and regulate their conduct”. It is up to Philosophy to examine the current conditions of science and life, to investigate the criteria, judgments and beliefs that “direct our conduct” (p. 67). And to develop a “system of operative ideas congruous with present knowledge and with present facilities of control over natural events”, to promote the “adjustment between the conclusions of natural science and the beliefs and values that have authority in the direction of life” (p. 284).

The proposition that the method of science is useful in the moral field is supported by the rejection of the dichotomy between knowledge and action, in defense of the fact that theoretical values cannot be separated from practical values. Philosophy must renounce this dualism in order to make possible the “interaction of our cognitive beliefs”,

⁷ - The same idea can be found in *Democracy and education*, from 1916, a work in which science is seen as the main resource to improve our means of action, and education must use it to change our “attitude of imagination and feeling” (DEWEY, 1959a, p. 246).

which rest upon “the most dependable methods of inquiry”, and “our practical beliefs about the values” (DEWEY, 1929, p. 36-37).⁸ All of our beliefs are derived from scientific investigation, whether they are about the nature and the “actual structure and processes of things”, or about the values that rule our conduct (p. 19). What Dewey (p. 48) wants is a balance between science and values, believing that “authentic beliefs about existence as they currently exist can operate fruitfully and efficaciously in connection with the practical problems”.⁹

Deweyan pragmatism is opposed to dualistic philosophies that seek in “antecedent Being” the “properties which alone have authority over the formation of our judgments of value that is, of the ends and purposes”, to which we attribute the power to guide our “intellectual, social, moral, religious, aesthetic” conduct (DEWEY, 1929, p. 69). Valuation judgments must result from “reflective investigation” (p. 262); they are tested and reviewed by “intelligent action” (p. 299); “intelligently directed action” is the appropriate means for the search for moral knowledge (p. 30); only the “instruments and doings of directed practice” allow the natural sciences to be brought into line with human purposes (p. 85).¹⁰

Examining Dewey’s discourse with the resources of rhetorical analysis, we note that the author articulates his reasoning through a notional dissociation, whose antithetical pair is formed by the terms Essence and Existence. When ranked, Essence appears as Term I, and Existence, as Term II. This philosophical pair expresses the author’s disagreement with the notion of knowledge as the essence or property of things, in favor of the notion of knowledge as “ulterior return to existential operations” (DEWEY, 1929, p. 159). Dewey (p. 200) describes “the known objects” as “consequences of directed operations”, not as results of “something antecedent”. Thus, knowledge is a “constructed, existentially produced object” (p. 211); its foundation is in “existential interactions” (p. 265); its validity is “tested by results and not by correspondence with antecedent properties of existence” (p. 146).

In *The quest for certainty*, other notions are added to Terms I (Essence) and II (Existence) of the already formed pair. Absolute (Term I) and Probable (Term II) characterize the reasoning that states that there are no indisputable values, only probable values, socially constructed and dependent on human actions (DEWEY, 1929, p. 194). We can never be sure of the effects of the expansion of the empirical method in the field of human actions: the “direct and original experience of things liked and enjoyed” are just “possibilities of values to be achieved” (p. 259).

The subjection of the Absolute to the Probable is also present in the experimental sciences and in the humanities. To Dewey (1929, p. 277), every belief has a “rehearsal character” and is therefore “hypothetical”, but it is necessary to observe that a moral law is similar to a “law of physics”, being nothing more than a “formula” that expresses how we respond to given “specific conditions” (p. 278). Knowledge produced by science is susceptible to revisions and continuous investigation, being possible to adopt the same parameters in any type of operation dedicated to solving problems, including those concerning moral values, because doubt, uncertainty, the

8- About Dewey’s belief and knowledge, see Amaral (2007).

9- About Dewey’s method and democracy, see Amaral (2007) and Cunha (1999a, 2001b).

10- In a 1903 essay, Dewey (2009) also advocates the connection between moral judgments and scientific method. On this topic, see Pappas (2008).

formulation of hypotheses and the dynamic relationship between thinking and action characterize all investigative processes.¹¹

Dewey (1929, p. 189) argues that all research provides probable knowledge for containing, in addition to theoretical elements, practical components involved in constantly changing problematic situations. As every investigation starts from a questioning situation, the degree of knowledge obtained resides in the possible relationships of an object in such situations. No investigation provides “complete security” because to investigate is to address “unique”, “relative” and “uncertain” situations, in which the element of change is recurrent (p. 7). Every investigation involves “overt doing” affected by “definite changes in the environment or in our relation to it”, which makes only probabilities possible, never absolute certainties (p. 86). The investigation provides only “indications, evidence and signs”, whose character is “intermediate, not ultimate” (p. 99).

Cunha (2001b, p. 89) explains that the notion of *change* is recurrent in Dewey’s discourse, being always used to “characterize the open, varied and unstable universe” of the scientific practices that “inspire the new philosophical attitude” proposed. In *The quest for certainty*, the constitution of the philosophical pair Permanence (Term I) and Change (Term II) is evident, since Dewey (1929, p. 274) finds in the transformation of the world the uncertain bases of all investigation: science, he says, it is “knowledge of the relations between changes which enable us to connect things as antecedents and consequences”.¹²

Dewey (1929, p. 3) does not intend to undermine the certainty of “a kingdom of order, justice”, as he admits that the main reason for scientific practices is to obtain safe values in life. Its difference from traditional philosophical movements is in not aiming for “absolute certainty”, a “complete system of immutable and necessary truth”, but putting certainty in the field of the possible, privileging the examination of the assumptions that ensure a probable degree of knowledge (p. 16). Uncertainty and, consequently, questionability are intrinsic to Dewey’s theory of knowledge, in which the search for knowledge is a “problem that never ends”, because when one problematic situation is resolved, another takes its place, replacing the uncertain nature of knowledge (p. 296).

The notional dissociation that results in the pair composed of Permanence (Term I) and Change (Term II) reflects the statement made by Dewey (1929, p. 193-194) that “there is no knowledge self-guaranteed to be infallible”, because “all knowledge is the product of special acts of inquiry”, and the investigation deals with changing practical situations. No investigation has a “knowledge monopoly” (p. 22). This is because, as Dewey (1959b, p. 129-130) analyzes in *Reconstruction in philosophy*, to investigate is “rationalizing the possibilities of experience”. Intelligence is not in obtaining “first and indemonstrable truths”, but in “the ability to estimate the possibilities of a situation and act according to its estimate” (DUTRA, 1929, p. 213).¹³

11- This idea is also found in *Democracy and education*: thinking must be tested, experienced, so that one can never “cover with perfect accuracy all the consequences” (DEWEY, 1959a, p. 165).

12- This same pair can be found in *Reconstruction in philosophy*, from 1920: “change, rather than fixity”, is the “measure of ‘reality’ or energy of being”; knowledge is a “correlation of changes”, an “ability to detect one change occurring in correspondence with another” (DEWEY, 1959b, p. 86-87).

13- In *The quest for certainty*, Dewey uses the developments of quantum mechanics to affirm that science, even fallible, produces knowledge (COSTA-LOPES; CUNHA, 2011).

These positions can be characterized as *fallibilists*, a term that expresses a way of seeing the world that privileges questionable and revisable aspects of existence, indicating the insufficiency of our knowledge (DUTRA, 2005, p. 77). This view of the world goes against foundational movements, so called because they seek to ensure the unquestionable character of knowledge, “an unwavering starting point in the consideration of philosophical issues, knowledge and human conduct” (p. 13).

Dewey rejects the foundationalist tradition that claims that there is knowledge only where there are “true and justified beliefs”, ideas “with a truth we can show beyond any doubt” (DUTRA, 2000, p. 31). Dewey differs from those who seek “self-evident truths, with which an unassailable base could be conferred on all human knowledge” (DUTRA, 2005, p. 78). In the Deweyan view, science does not indicate a path “full of certainty and infallible strategies, linear and previously determinable”, but a roadmap of possibilities that are drawn “within an unstable universe, in which knowledge is provisional” (CUNHA, 2004, p. 118).

Pyrrho and the search for truth

Dutra (2005, p. 13) explains that at the beginning of modernity, in direct opposition to the foundational movements, the philosophical field was conceived as “the object of fallible and incomplete theories”. Porchat Pereira (2007, p. 81) adds that Pyrrhonism was decisive in the “creation of the intellectual atmosphere” that made modern Philosophy viable. Popkin (2000) recalls that the problem of knowledge was established in the 16th century, due to the rediscovery of the writings of Sextus Empiricus, whose questioning impelled the Protestant Reformation. The criteria of the Church were contested by the reformers, raising uncertainties about the correct standard for understanding the truths of religion, and this favored the resumption of the problem specific to the Pyrrhonians, the discussion about the truth.

In the Renaissance era, it was Montaigne (1533-1592) who most revered Sextus’ Pyrrhonian elaborations, affirming that the examination of sensitive experience, the basis of all knowledge, reveals that none of our points of view is endowed with certainty or reliable foundation, reason whereby the “only way is to follow the old Pyrrhonism and suspend judgment” (POPKIN, 2000, p. 103). Although opponents of these ideas have made respectable attempts to dismantle or soften Pyrrhonism, this philosophical movement projected its influence over the centuries to come, being shaped by different theorists and assuming different connotations.

Deweyan fallibilism may have been influenced by this historically recent movement, but it should be noted that the dubious attitude that emerges in the early days of modernity was preceded, if not inspired by the formulations of Pyrrho of Elis, a thinker of the Hellenistic era responsible for creating the discursive framework which gave rise to all later forms of skepticism. To conclude whether Dewey’s fallibilism has anything to do with Pyrrho, we must ask whether the philosophical pairs identified in Dewey’s discourse are present in Pyrrhean formulations.

The answer comes from Sextus Empiricus (1997, p. 115) who systematizes pyrrhonian ideas and opposes them to dogmatics and academics, representatives of trends of thinking

who were also concerned with the theme of truth. Dogmatists are classified as those who claim to have discovered the truth, while academics prescribe that the truth cannot be apprehended because the impressions coming from the sensory organs are not reliable. For Sextus, only the Pyrrhonians are interested in continuing the search for certainty.

Pyrrhonism is identified with the etymology of the word *skepticism*, *skeptikói*, derived from the Greek term *sképtomai*, “those who observe”, who “examine” (PORCHAT PEREIRA, 2007, p. 296). Pyrrho’s followers, particularly Sextus, gave skepticism the connotation of “continuous and tireless investigation” (PORCHAT PEREIRA, 2007, p. 42). Because they do not even support the veracity of their own formulations and because they do not claim to be “capable of definitively establishing any point”, the Pyrrhonians present themselves as those who develop “permanent philosophical research”, an attitude that derives the *zetetic* denomination - from *zetein*, to inquire, to have doubts, to investigate - with what they call their own school (PORCHAT PEREIRA, 2007, p. 77).

In the characterization of Pyrrhonian skepticism made by Sextus, it is evident the presence of the Essence/Existence pair that we identified in the Deweyan discourse. The Pyrrhonian attitude does not agree with those who express a “definitive knowledge” about something “not evident”, as if they had certainties supported by definitive formulations about the real, as Porchat Pereira (2007, p. 224) says, nor with those who, because they do not trust the data obtained through the senses, they claim that there is no “guaranteed standard for determining which of our judgments are true and which are false” (POPKIN, 2000, p. 13). Pyrrhonians reject both the search for the Essence of things to unravel its internal structure, supposedly hidden in its true being, and the categorical denial of the truth, due to the impossibility of apprehending it; they prefer to remain within the limits of phenomenal manifestation (VERDAN, 1998).

Pyrrhonian doubt is not a means to elucidate what is supposedly hidden on the plan of Essence, above Existence; its purpose is to promote the debate on the “*human discourse* that is proposed as an interpretation of the phenomenal appearance and as the unveiling of the *internal discourse* of the object” with the intention of manifesting “the being beyond *appearing*” (PORCHAT PEREIRA, 2007, p. 93).¹⁴ Pyrrhonism maintains the desire to find the truth, without ever abandoning the dubious attitude (DUTRA, 1997, p. 46-47). The Pyrrhonian can simulate dogmatism and elaborate theories, but always suspends judgment to keep his/her beliefs as hypotheses. In this guideline, the presence of the Absolute/Probable Deweyan pair is noted, as hypotheses are formulations that are submitted to proof, elaborated so that we can investigate their value.

Dutra (1993, p. 51) analyzes that the central objective of the philosopher of permanent investigation is to continue “his attempts to re-elaborate doctrines and investigate against them without being accused of proceeding irrationally”. Hypotheses are something that can be affirmed only in the plan of the Probable, not of the Absolute, and for that reason we can pyrrhonically “investigate against them, that is, put them to the test”. What distances the skeptic from the dogmatic is that the latter petrifies knowledge when the research work is terminated at some point, refraining from proceeding with the “perennial examination of hypotheses” (DUTRA, 1997, p. 55-56).

14- All italics inside quotation marks are from the works cited.

If it is relatively easy to locate the Essence/Existence and Absolute/Probable philosophical pairs in Pyrrhonism, the same cannot be said about Permanence/Change, which is equally relevant in Deweyan discourse, as Pyrrho's purpose does not seem to coincide with Dewey's. Let us see how Sextus Empiricus (1997, p. 120-121) exposes the process that takes the Pyrrhonian to the position that characterizes it as such: initially the skeptic philosophizes to deliberate on the truth or falsity of what comes to him/her through the senses and, thus, to be able to achieve "tranquility", *ataraxia*, which naturally comes from the conclusion of this philosophizing; along this path, faces insoluble controversies and chooses to suspend judgment, *epoché*, which ends up putting him/her in the initially desired state, tranquility. Sextus Empiricus (1997, p. 121) concludes by saying that skeptics "do not determine whether things are good or bad, do not avoid them or seek them avidly, and, therefore, are not disturbed".

It is evident that the highest objective of the Pyrrhonian attitude is to reach a state of non-disturbance, tranquility, which suggests passivity, not commitment to the occurrences of the phenomenal world. Skeptics live "according to the norms of ordinary life", since they cannot be "totally inactive"; they are "capable of perception and thinking", they are taken to eat and drink due to the "necessary character of the sensations". Their behavior is governed by laws and customs dictated by tradition, which is why they consider mercifulness a good thing, and wickedness a bad thing (SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, 1997, p. 120). Not judging on things, their attitude is one of inertia in the face of the phenomenon; not being able to react even in the face of inequities, they are prevented from acting in favor of the transformation of the world.

This description shows the distance that separates the Deweyan discursive framework from the Pyrrhonian, since Dewey's philosophy is clearly based on inciting action, aiming at leading his audience to adopt behaviors that transform the social order. This, incidentally, is the aim of the discourse elaborated by the American philosopher in favor of educational renewal, as can be read in *Democracy and education* (DEWEY, 1959a), his most relevant work on the subject. Its intention is to awaken in people the desire - which must be converted into action - for a more balanced society in the future (CUNHA, 2001c; CUNHA, 2016). This is the meaning of the Dewey Permanence/Change pair, and nothing sounds stranger to Dewey's purposes than Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*, the intended exemption from judgment before the facts of existence.

In search of a new pedagogy

The core of the distance between Dewey and Pyrrho is in the commitment to the transformation of the world, an attitude assumed by the first and replaced, in the second, by the search for tranquility. Their discursive milestones come close because they reject the expectation of finding certainty and truth in the sphere that supposedly houses the essence of things and absolute judgments, opting for the endless investigation of the phenomena of existence to achieve probable statements; but it is only Dewey who sustains this position when he conceives that the world is a reality in constant change, impossible to be grasped by a philosophy of permanence.

In this respect, Dewey is familiar with another ancient philosophical movement, the sophistry, from which the Pyrrhonians inherited the refusal of dogmatism, but not the possibility of establishing, through discourse, *logos*, what things are (MAZZOTTI, 2008; SCHIAPPA, 2003). Pyrrho's dubious attitude stems from the sophistic way of arguing, called *antilogic*, which consists of opposing one *logos* to another in order to "discover or draw attention to the presence of an opposition in an argument, or in a thing or situation" (KERDERD, 2003, p. 109). But Protagoras does not deny the truth; his well-known formulation "what seems true to anyone is true for him to whom it seems so" means only that we cannot refer to the truth in absolute terms, but we have the means to support "particular truths"; opinions differ, but, through rhetoric, we can always "make the previously weaker reason stronger" (PORCHAT PEREIRA, 2007, p. 14).

Sophistry was a response to the transformations that took place in the Greek world between the years 450 and 400 B.C., when Athens experienced a moment of profound criticism of current values and beliefs. The positioning of man at the center of social life changed the meaning of the philosophical thinking hitherto produced, the goal of which was to investigate the initial principle, the *arché* of all things; instead of a philosophy focused on Essence, the sophists proposed to understand the concrete existence of the citizen in that political environment. Instead of being guided by what exists by nature, *phusei*, the sophistic movement promoted the debate on what is established by convention, *nomos*, privileging to discuss deliberation processes, particularly those that affect the collectivity. No longer the truth inhabiting the Absolute plan, referenced in the myth; what counts now is man's action before what is merely Probable, which changes as the circumstances of life in society change (SILVA; CUNHA, 2015, p. 71).

In the sophistic reflections, therefore, all the philosophical pairs that we identified in the Deweyan discourse are found - Essence/Existence, Absolute/Probable and Permanence/Change -, being the first and second also present in the Pyrrhonian thinking. If Deweyan educational propositions can be seen as skeptical, as we said at the beginning of this work, it should be added now that they can, with even more reason, also be called sophistic. In our first section, we tried to show that such propositions, even if they can be classified as skeptical, do not necessarily lead to school disorder. Situating Dewey in this other philosophical record, we can add that the uncertainty in the field of education may mean not disorder, but the search for a new pedagogy, since the purpose of the sophist movement was precisely to present a new way of educating man. The sophist *paideia* aimed at the "total man", the one who serves the city by assuming transformative practices, which requires an educational conception capable of covering both the physical and emotional components of the student (SILVA; CUNHA, 2015, p. 74).

The education proposed by the sophists and by Dewey has been updated in order to compose a pedagogy radically contrary to the dominant trend in contemporary education. This update can contribute to broaden the critical reflections developed by several researchers, such as Biesta (2013, p. 37-38), who sees the current educational guidelines as having a "language of learning" that describes the educational situation as a simple transaction; "the learner is the (potential) consumer", a carrier of needs, while "the teacher, the educator or the educational institution are seen as the provider, that is, the

one who exists to satisfy the needs of the learner". Education is today "a commodity – a 'thing'- to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution, and to be consumed by the learner". But education cannot be reduced to the economic dimension because the educational contents and objectives are fundamentally political, not a matter to be considered within the scope of individual preferences or needs, apart from the collectivity. The language of learning makes it difficult to formulate questions that are beyond the client's personal sphere or the market, which makes "democratic deliberation about education goals" unfeasible (p. 43).¹⁵

The authors favorable to Dewey, seen in the first section of this paper, believe that the Deweyan propositions foster the ethical and aesthetic dimension of the work of educating, as opposed to theories that prioritize measurable results and conduct that, emulating the functioning of the market, make education analogous to a contract between sellers and buyers. The criticism of this trend allows the emergence of innovative practical contributions to school work based on Dewey, and inspires to give the name of *poetic pedagogy* to Dewey's educational philosophy (CUNHA, 2010; CUNHA; PIMENTA, 2011).¹⁶ The word *poetic* comes from the Greek *poiesis*, denoting that the teaching profession is comparable to the work of the poet, the one who is responsible for creating something, articulating means to bring into existence what does not present itself as such (GARRISON, 2010, p. 8). Based on Dewey, Garrison (2010, p. 73) affirms that teachers bring the good of their students into existence, being necessary, for this, to be able to bring their own good into existence, that they become capable of creating in themselves the skills and values concerning a "practical wisdom", *phrónesis*, which combines know how to do it with the moral disposition to do good.

Teaching is an art, *techné*, which transcends the limits imposed by the current market environment. The maximum value of teaching is individuality, in the radical sense of the term, involving the manifestation of desires and knowledge of the teacher and the student and the search for attuning them to the goal of changing social reality. It is a process that is not apprehended through quantitative analysis tools, although such resources are useful for organizing certain school practices.

The familiarity between Dewey and the sophists suggests another name for the Deweyan propositions, in addition to *poetic pedagogy*. Crick (2010, 2015a) uses *rhetorical pedagogy* to describe the educational approach that employs the radicalism of the Dewey conception of democracy in order to totally involve the individual in releasing his/her impulses, aiming to develop the potential to deliberate and act intelligently. In Deweyan political philosophy, the foundation of democracy is unconditional faith in man's inclination towards communication, persuasion, intelligence-controlled discussion, the interactional activity that employs rationality in favor of forming consensus on topics

15- Vergara (2015, p. 598-599) makes a similar criticism, showing that the "episteme of modern didactics" adopts the false belief that "the subjects, regardless of their culture and history, must learn certain contents - skills, abilities, competencies - selected for them as valid", in the hope of achieving an egalitarian and balanced society. This procedure does not admit the uncertainty and complexity of the real world, as it applies to a "parallel world" marked by simple and immutable certainties, the only world that accepts the intended intervention.

16- Among practical applications, see Doddington (2014, p. 1263), who proposes teaching philosophy to children to dissolve the tension between students' "creative imagination" and the rigidity of school structures. See also Farrys and Sengupta (2016), who use Deweyan aesthetic and democratic conceptions to support a non-mechanistic computational literacy proposal.

of public interest. It is in the context of democratic experience that one learns to define means and ends and to evaluate the limits and possibilities of each person's desires, through the consequences of action.

The radical nature of rhetorical pedagogy lies in the purpose of leading students to compose and express the power that emanates from their personal inclinations, not in the narrow space of individual life, but in the broad horizon of collectivity, in which there are controversies that demand debate between competing theses. Mental activity, as Dewey defines it, is not just used to build or deconstruct values related to individuality; individuality being built in the sphere of experience, and being the social experience, the work of the mind consists of creating and recreating innovative and intelligent habits and methods designed to project the individual into the public space of deliberation and action.

Such conceptualizations regarding rhetorical pedagogy result from a review of the legacy left by the sophists for philosophy and education. Until recently, the pejorative view from Platonism regarding this legacy prevailed, but new interpretations have updated this theme, showing sophistry as a set of educational principles and procedures aimed at the education of man for a democratic society (SILVA; CUNHA, 2015). Crick (2015b, p. 9) characterizes rhetoric not as a simple tool of persuasion in the service of political purposes beyond ethical appraisals, but as a "means of constitution, resistance and transformation of power", because what characterizes it is "construction and dissemination of symbolic forms" that aim to make the feeling of "shared humanity" effective.

Final considerations

In *The name of the rose*, one of Umberto Eco's characters (1986, p. 330) suggests that "not infrequently, books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves". The library that occupies the center of the novel's plot would then be "the place of a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another". This image mirrors the method adopted in the investigation now concluded: we assume that authors and books located in different times and places dialogue with each other, and our task as researchers is to challenge the obstacle imposed by time and by different forms of discourse.

This work sought to place a contemporary author, John Dewey, in dialogue with ancient philosophers, characterizing them as belonging to a historically demarcated tradition of thought, the *rhetorical tradition*. Sophists occupy the starting point, and Dewey, the highest point in this tradition. This method of analysis requires some caution, since the researched discourses were constructed in very different contexts, and one cannot inadvertently compare a proposition that responds to problems of the ancient era with propositions formulated in the 20th century.

We do not intend to organize a taxonomy to group the philosophers and thinkers of education, but we cannot deny the usefulness of methods established by other sciences, as long as they are properly adjusted to our field of investigation. When we identify argumentative strategies that make up discursive frameworks in scenarios of extensive

diversity and temporal variety, we do not expect to find a full identity; what we are looking for are homologies in the midst of differences, coincidences that can be attributed to a common ancestry - in this case, the sophistry -, understanding the particularities as a result of the multiplicity of historical contexts.

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