

**Pragmatism**

**A Philosophy for a Latin American Practice**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to discuss the applications of American philosophy - mostly focusing on Pragmatism – in Latin America, more particularly in Brazil, its largest country. Apart from merely analyzing the reception of Pragmatism in the local academia and intellectual life, the paper intends to investigate precisely how Pragmatism’s ideas and concepts have been applied into the political and social practices of Latin America - even when those involved in such practices are not aware of that or have not been familiarized with the philosophy of Pragmatism. The paper argues that a number of contemporary Latin American political and social experiences may be more adequately grasped through the theoretical framework provided by Pragmatism, and in order to make this claim the paper analyses some ideas and concepts framed by American philosophers such as John Dewey.

Pragmatism has certainly always been considered America's most distinctive contribution to philosophy. That which is thus frequently named 'American philosophy' has notwithstanding recently become a remarkable – however disputed and contested – political practice in Latin America – and I would add, a remarkable contribution of North American philosophy to South American political science.

As a philosophy, Pragmatism is very little known in Latin America in general, and in Brazil in particular. We count with a small number of Pragmatist's writings translated to both Spanish and Portuguese, and in this latter language we might be able to find some of Dewey's writings translated (I myself have co-edited a small volume of Dewey's political writings last year), but almost none of Peirce's and James's works have been published in Brazil. The so called Neopragmatism, however, has been more fortunate. Rorty's ideas have been quite spread in philosophy departments in Brazil, and his books have been considerably translated in recent years. As an adherent of the classical pragmatism though, I am not sure I should evaluate that as good or bad, but I am quite sure Rorty's engagement in the linguistic turn considered in isolation – as well as Putnam's, Quine's or Davidson's – is definitely not what allows one to appreciate American philosophy's impact in Brazil.

While in philosophy academic departments Pragmatism has been eventually reduced to Rorty's reevaluation of classical pragmatists ideas through his philosophy of language, in Brazilian sociology departments Pragmatism has recently found some room through some international applications of American philosophy, such as the theory of action of the German Hans Joas, and the moral social ideas of the French Pragmatists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenaut. Just as Rorty, Joas, Boltanski and Thévenaut have been instrumental to recast interest in Pragmatism. But the Brazilian appreciation of their work is far from shading light into classical Pragmatism, or the true American philosophy of Peirce, James and Dewey.

One will however find Dewey being read and taught in other domains. On education departments, Dewey's work has always been studied, some scholarship has been developed,

and educators have been responsible for most of the Portuguese translations of Dewey's writings. In other hand, Dewey's ideas on education, that were very influential on the late 1920's and early 1930's, have hardly ever found a practical application, and unfortunately there are very little successful educational experiences that took Dewey's ideas seriously, although there have been some serious attempts to do so, such as the Brazilian movement toward a 'New School'.

Perhaps the most significant reawake of Dewey's ideas in the past few years is felt in South America just as it is in North American political science: through democratic theory. Once again, however, Dewey is read indirectly, mediated by the works of American political theorists such as James Bohman and Benjamin Barber, and also by the German critical theorists Jürgen Habermans and Hans Joas. More recently, Brazilian most internationally known scholar, Roberto Mangabeira Unger, has reclaimed Pragmatism in a compelling and intriguing book which relies a lot on Dewey's doctrine of experience; though, as he usually publishes in English and is not very fond of referencing, Brazilian readers remain lacking not only primary but also secondary sources of Dewey's thought.

As a political scientist, I must myself admit that it has not been an easy task to convince my Brazilian colleagues and students, so fascinated and bewitched by the new theories of participative and deliberative democracy, that Dewey has long before anticipated most of the ideas and concepts that now seem so fashionable in the academia, such as the very notions of participation and deliberation. While political theorists who work on democracy are slowly turning their attention to Dewey, empirical political scientists who work on political institutions have been too quick on identifying Pragmatism as a the typical way of doing politics in the country.

Such a perhaps early diagnose has although allowed for a renewed interest on Pragmatism, particularly on the side of progressive and leftists political scientists who wanted to provide some consistent explanation of the current presidency which is now in its second

term in office after being since its early days called a 'pragmatic government', not only in an ordinary but also in a depreciative sense. The same is true for political analysts who searched for a coherent ground where to base their evaluations of the Workers Party (PT: Partido dos Trabalhadores) as a 'pragmatic party' which supposedly rely on pragmatic political alliances in order to keep itself in power, supposedly put forward social policies for the purpose of gaining popular support, and supposedly seek controversial coalitions in order to win the local level elections.

Pragmatism as a philosophy would thus serve Brazilian political scientists who seek to describe and explain the behavior of some national political institutions and actors, as well as the rules and policies enforced by them. Provided with philosophical meaning, the ordinary sense of what is called a pragmatic politics turns out to be a valuable theory of democracy, particularly a theory which finds fertile ground in recent democracies, such as it is the case of the Latin American countries that have been re-democratized after quite long authoritarian periods in the second half of the 20th century. Countries such Argentina, Chile, Peru, and especially Brazil have found creative ways of overcoming the ashes of dictatorship, and leaving behind the remainders of authoritarianism.

Such creativity, as I have just qualified that particular way of overcoming authoritarianism, involves a very practical way of doing politics, one that allows for a democratic experience which is as fragile as recent, and allows for political institutions which are as fallible as unstable. Where there is no tradition, experience abounds. Where history lacks as a provider of grounds, experience develops free of dogmatisms. Where values have been contested by history, facts are what put experience forward. Where the past must be somehow rejected, the future gives meaning to the present.

I could go on: where words have denied rights, and actions have denied lives, political consequences must be seriously evaluated, and necessarily anticipated. But the recentness of the regime transition, the fragility of democracy and the instability of political institutions are

but one reason why Pragmatism can find a productive soil to develop itself as a practice in Latin American countries in general, and Brazil in particular. Another reason for engendering pragmatism in politics is not merely political in its origins, but social.

Where democracy is still being shaped – although for Pragmatism it will always and constantly be being shaped – justice has yet no definite form. The repression of twentieth century's authoritarianism in places already marked by the oppression of earlier centuries' colonialism has led to very fragile systems of justice, and has particularly led to a profound lack of social justice. The absence of social justice can be measured by the presence of very high levels of inequality, explicit poverty, and increasing and uncontrolled violence.

Despite the position one occupies in the political-ideological continuum, one cannot but accept the fact that in recent years social inequality at least has decreased to a perceptible level. Moreover, one cannot but accept the fact that such a decrease is due to redistributive policies enforced by recent governments, particularly the same one that in Brazil is identified as pragmatist. Unfortunately, as I have mentioned earlier, such pragmatic label is given in a negative and pejorative sense as to mean the alleged populism of the chief Executive, Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. I am sure were the basics of pragmatist philosophy known by my fellow political scientist colleagues, they would soon realize that Lula is actually a practitioner of what Dewey called intelligence, a social and thus political intelligence.

Only a social intelligence would adopt recognizable liberal policies of redistributive income transfer in order to reduce poverty and inequality, and only a pragmatist mind would endorse an intelligent action such as adopting liberal means in order to achieve social radical ends, just like Dewey defended. I am not only claiming that what is today sometimes called populism in Latin America (and here I do specifically have Brazil in mind) is in reality the application of philosophical pragmatism to politics. I am also claiming that what is today called pragmatism in Brazil is in fact the putting in practice of Dewey's ideas on democracy.

Does one needs to assume himself as a pragmatist in order to be one? I guess not, and I dare to say a pragmatist would never ask himself such a question. This room is loaded with some of the most notable pragmatists alive, so you guys tell me if I am wrong. One is certainly a pragmatist when he acts as one, even without being aware of that. A democracy can thus certainly be called a pragmatic democracy when the performance of its social and political institutions as well as their outputs, and the actions of its social and political actors as well as their consequences, put in practice the ideas and concepts endorsed by pragmatist philosophy. Peirce has taught us that the meaning of things reside in its effects. His famous pragmatic maxim, as we know, teaches that meaning is given by the practical bearings of the effects an object yields.

One needs not to know Peirce's theory of meaning in order to realize that Brazilian democracy has been producing plenty of desirable effects over the last few years, and also that those effects are clearly the result of a very pragmatic way of doing politics. Besides the achievements regarding social justice through an undeniable reduction of poverty and inequality, both Brazilians and Brazilianists, both ordinary people and gifted intellectuals, all agree that the national political institutions – as well as the economy – are now becoming stable and solid: one counts with a very competitive and plural party system, periodic and universal elections, an active and plural Congress (though not free of charges of corruption as it seems to be the rule around the world), a strongly accepted and highly approved Presidency, an increasingly respected Supreme Court, a fair adoption of judicial review, a legitimate legal system, a free and open media, a surprising proliferation and empowerment of social movements, a vivid public sphere, a breakthrough of participative and deliberative practices and experiments that have being exported to several countries in the world (as it is the case of the now famous participatory budget) – not to mention the massive turnout on elections due to the very educative (and thus pragmatic) experience of compulsory voting, and the admirably clear, fair, and clean election process.

If one can thus recognize the good achievements regarding the improvement of social justice and political stability, one should also recognize the good consequences of adopting a pragmatic way of doing politics. But what seems most important to me is to provide such a political pragmatism with its philosophical meaning. This meaning is certainly there, measured by its effects, even if not in the consciousness and intention of those who make it come true, nor of those who share the consequences of the actions of the latter. Hence, what worries me is the fact that the lack of knowledge of what philosophical pragmatism is leads people to take political pragmatism as a sort of Realpolitik, or as a simply updated and sophisticated version of realism, or even as a bastard son of utilitarianism. Notice that I am not merely claiming that political pragmatism should be reconciled with philosophical pragmatism, since I believe what is called political pragmatism is nothing different than a practical political application of philosophical pragmatism – and thus there is no use of reconciling two things that are actually one and the same thing.

Brazilian democracy can be seen as a political practice of pragmatist philosophy especially because of its highly experimental and consequential character, and its forward-looking feature, but also because of the fallibility, revisability and reflexivity that distinguish its institutions and policies, as well as the actions undertaken by its political actors – and here I would include not only those that Dewey called ‘the officials’, but also those that he called the common men. If democracy is to be a way of life, pragmatism is to Brazilian democracy a way of doing politics. If democracy is to be creative, creativity is in Brazil a way of being pragmatist. If democracy is to be radical, then Brazilian political pragmatism is but a practice of philosophical pragmatism. And if there is anything extraordinary in that, it is simply the fact of its ordinariness.

As a political theorist working in a political science department in Brazil, and as a convicted Pragmatist, I have not long ago realized it was more productive to propagate Pragmatism’s ideas and concepts, as well as its main authors and writings, through a very

practical way of doing normative (yes, normative) theory: empirical research. It was the initial results of my first two empirical-oriented research projects that made me confirm that the recent democratic experience of my country was a rich and fertile practical application of the theoretical framework of the two philosophical traditions that I have always cherished most and have devoted the largest part of my scholarship: Pragmatism and Marxism.

Where my research assistants could only see quantitative data, numbers and percentages, I was seeing what in my previous publications I have called a 'materialistic normativism': a belief that politics is to be conjugated in the conditional tense, that the present meaning of political actions relies in its future, and that this future can be inferred from normative formulations based on materialist assumptions, that is, on the observation of facts and the imputation of values.

Such materialistic normativism is the ground where I have been working the concept of 'pragmatic democracy', a descriptive concept that gives shape to what I have few years ago first called in very abstract terms an 'ordinary democracy'. Pragmatic democracy, as I have been claiming it, aims to provide a dialectical alternative to the supposed dualism that takes place between representation and participation/deliberation, or, in other words, between representative democracy and other forms of democracy which are supposedly non-representative. Through an at once normatively formulated and empirically oriented approach, pragmatic democracy seeks to offer a new approach to the study of Brazilian democracy and its political institutions. More particularly, it intends to provide an interpretative framework to the political analyses of particular events, such as the increasing institutionalization of participative practices and deliberative experiences in Brazil, as well as its effects on the law-making and decision-making processes.

It is thus guided by the intent of establishing a cooperation among theorists and empiricists, philosophers and political analysts, that the pragmatic approach to democracy subscribes the materialistic normativism as an adequate epistemological and methodological



perspective which is bound to promote a reconciliation between the empirical approach that is common to studies on political institutions and the normative approach that is characteristic of contemporary political theorizing.

In order to be simultaneously normative and empirical, pragmatic democracy should be simultaneously pursued in an epistemological, an analytical, and a critical dimension. Each of those three dimensions is for its turn pragmatically oriented: the epistemological dimension leads to reflexivity, the analytical dimension to practicalism (in the sense of the Kantian notion of *pragmatisch*, and not of *praktisch*), and the critical dimension leads to experimentalism. The pragmatic approach that I vindicate as an adequate perspective to the study of the processes under which democracy has been consolidating in Brazil is thus at once reflexive, practical and experimental.

But it is mainly the democratic experimentalism that one can envisage in Brazil's attempts to turn experiences of participation and deliberation into inputs to the traditional representative institutions – or to put it in another words, to turn what Dewey used to call “political democracy” into the “idea of democracy” or “democracy as a way of life” – that allows me to call my country's democracy pragmatic, and to use this concept to make some normative claims on how pragmatism shall be taken as an appropriate instrument and an useful resource to understand Brazilian democracy and design its political institutions.

Let me now begin to sketch some of these claims. First, democracy should be based on *human experience*. A political account of experience, and particularly of human experience, should be taken as central to democracy. This initial argument should be unfolded in three other points. One, the concept of experience must be reactivated in order to respond the assault of the idea of language in contemporary thought. After the so-called pragmatic and linguistic turns, language became a central but immobilizing notion for both social and political theory. Language is but one form of experience, and it is far from being a specific or unique form of human experience. There are forms of human experience which are pre-linguistic or

non-linguistic and they cannot be suppressed by the hegemonic role played by language in contemporary thought. Two, *humanism* should be brought back to the fore of politics. Institutional and normative approaches to the political have been undermining the role played by human beings in democracy. The reflexivity and responsiveness of human values and beliefs have been converted into a fixed and static set of procedures and institutional arrangements that have already proven themselves as limited and even dysfunctional. To humanize democracy means making the political not only the realm of interests and will, but also of values and beliefs. Three, the concept of *praxis*, along with that of *activity* (in the German sense of the word '*Tätigkeit*' as it is employed by Marx), should be taken as central to the understanding of what experience is and what human experience should mean in a democracy. Experience shall be conceived as a human praxis, the sharing of consequences of any activity undertaken by men in a political community which fulfills a social demand even if through an individual action. Democracy should thus be conceived as spatially and temporally spread in human praxis and action, and shall not be restricted to political institutions. Democracy is a movement from which the State institutions are but one moment.

Second claim: democracy should be always conceived as closely related to the idea of community. Pragmatic democracy is a communal democracy, a form of human association which seeks to provide a political organization that is able to supersede the modern form of the State. Once the modern State may be considered as but one moment of an ongoing movement toward the achievement of democracy, it is plausible to suppose that democracy can express itself beyond the State form. This communal approach to democracy intends to mean more than a mere relativistic or particularistic communitarian approach to politics, such as those that have fatefully ended up as disguised versions of contemporary liberalism. I shall offer at least three reasons for that. First, what makes democracy a communal form of the political is the intention of conceiving and perceiving it locally, that is, from the standpoint of its peripheral manifestations. Second, the communal means that democracy implies the

creation of spaces, and of new spaces. Third, to argue for a necessary interrelationship between democracy and community equals to argue for the political as a conjugation between the social and the individual. The common or generic essence of the political subjects is the same one that constitutes the community where democracy shall take place.

Here we come to the third claim. The common man is the sole political subject of a pragmatic democracy. The 'common man' is the political subject named by Dewey after having written extensively on the shadowy and formless 'public' who once organized and articulated would allow democracy to flow by itself thus converting the world into a 'great community'. The common man is anyone and everyone. And he is so socially considered in his individuality and in his singularity. The common man is an empirical existence and in this sense he is an average man. The common man is an expression of humanity and in this sense he is a generic man. This means that in every act of a particular man is contained the genus, the human genus. Therefore the common man is a generic being, a '*Gattungswesen*' as Marx has defined it, and Dewey probably read and was influenced by. The common or generic being constitutes and affirms himself as a political subject through his activity in such a way that practice and subjectivity overlap. The political subject is thus conceived as social practice. And as the political subject of democracy, the common man presents himself as the expression of a desirable marriage between politics and ontology.

Let me now comment a little further on each of these claims. For pragmatist philosophy, what should be the relation between democracy and experience? First of all, what is at stake is not any form of experience, but human experience. And what makes an experience human? Or, putting it in another way, what turns an experience into a humanistic one? Human experience is one that involves an action caused by human beings which produces consequences that might be shared by other human beings. A humanistic experience is thus one that yields consequences willing to improve human nature and human life. Dewey means by experience "the free interaction of individual human beings with surrounding

conditions, especially the human surroundings, which develops and satisfies need and desire by increasing knowledge of things as they are” (1939a: 343).

When related to democracy, human experience should be regarded as a process. Democracy is to be carried on in the day by day, as a continuous and permanent movement, a process that has no end until experience itself comes to an end. The task of democracy is thus that of “creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute” (1939a: 343). This process is naturally open and infinite, and this also signifies that experience should not only be considered an end of democracy but also a means for achieving it. Human experience is therefore both the means and the end of democracy. It is from this idea that follows Dewey’s faith on human nature as a means to recreate and develop culture. Democracy – such as the political broadly conceived – is a meaningful part of this.

It is very easy to name a democracy, so it is easy to identify a society as democratic once it follows a pattern that we became used to call democratic. But what really makes a democracy, accordingly to Dewey, is not simply the fulfillment of certain political ends – such as the enforcement of a constitution, the praise of popular sovereignty, the rule of the majority, the guarantee of rights, and so on – but the means by which these ends are to be fulfilled. Since the true end of democracy is a radical one, a socially radical one, the means through which it is to be implemented must be necessarily democratic, but not necessarily should these means follow a definite trend of ideological or political orientation.

Those means which are as important to democracy as its ends are neither institutional nor procedural means; they are human means that ultimately depend on human beings. This claim is supported by Dewey’s belief on the “power of voluntary action based on public collective intelligence”. Here we come to the role that both intelligence and creativity play in Dewey’s thought. Dewey notion of ‘creative intelligence’ play the role of reason in politics. The creative intelligence of human beings is what allows them to undertake ‘creative actions’ willing to recreate democracy. The inventive effort and the creative activity of human beings

taken as means and not ends are what put together Dewey's belief in democracy and his faith in the common man.

Dewey is aware that a habit has been created "of thinking of democracy as a kind of political mechanism that will work as long as citizens were reasonable faithful in performing political duties" (1939a:341). This habit undermines and weakens democracy so far as it yields the false belief that it is bound to reproduce and reinforce itself through the institutions which has once been created in order to implement it. Those institutions need more than an act of citizenship every two or four years to be put in motion. Democracy's motion is a constant one, and the role of human beings in it is broader than the role they have as simple citizens. Democracy is a human matter before being a political matter, and thus it should address men as men, and not only men as citizens.

This is why democracy should be regarded as a way of life. It should enter man's life and becomes something that not only occurs extraordinarily in some given periods and determinate situations, but something that ordinarily constitutes the regular routine of every human being. Hence, any personal action should receive a political content; any individual activity should be granted a social meaning. Politics shall then be found in local and focalized instances of interaction among human beings, and thus provide an actual instance for self-government. And self-government is the government of the common man.

The belief in the common man, Dewey maintains, "has no significance save as an expression of belief in the intimate and vital connections of democracy and human nature" (1939: 97). The argument that the common man should be seen as the real subject of politics brings along with it the claim that there is a link between democracy and human nature that should allow for a reconnection of the contemporary theory of democracy to humanism.

There is no doubt that democracy always presupposes a belief that political institutions are such as to take account of human nature. What Dewey warns one about is that the lack of an adequate theory of human nature in its relations to democracy may cause

democratic ends and methods to become a matter of tradition and habit; thus they may turn out to be unsusceptible to new social needs and conditions, as well as uneasy to change accordingly to the dynamism of society's demands.

Analogously, it is certain that human nature, freed from external constraints, will always produce democratic institutions and make efforts to improve those already existent. Dewey's point regarding this apparently obvious fact is that this statement should be made from the other side, that is: "democracy means the belief that humanistic culture *should* prevail" (1939: 97). Interestingly enough, Dewey takes this as a moral claim since it is based on a proposition regarding what democracy *should* be; but in fact Dewey is here developing a normative account of the political – even though that would be a heterodox kind of normativity, particularly when brought close to the contemporary debate on democratic theory.

Democracy is thus a way of life determined by a faith in the endless possibilities of human nature. This faith relies specially on the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and creative action. In other words, it relies on the reflexivity and responsiveness that defines human nature in contrast to political institutions. The latter, says Dewey, are not sufficiently self-corrective as to respond to the increasingly demands of human experience.

Democracy should thus be perceived as expressed in the attitudes of human beings, and should be measured by the consequences produced in their lives. In this regard, when Dewey says that democracy is a personal way of individual life, he means that it "signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life" (1939a: 341). This is how the common man is shaped.

The claim that democracy should be grounded on human experience rather than on political institutions points to an influence that Dewey has certainly profited from his studies of Marx, particularly of the young Marx. Both Marx and Dewey put forward quite similar notions

of the political subject, though based on different frameworks and postulates. Before turning the proletariat into a historical subject, the young Marx had written extensively on the 'generic being' (*Gattungswesen*) as a central figure to both his ideas of democracy and emancipation. As he described in his critique of representation, the generic being is anyone who turn a socially relevant need into a generic activity thus representing every men as a determination of him. The image of the generic being given by Marx is that of a cobbler who, by simple being who he is and doing what he does, might intervene politically as much as a representative and thus turn civil society into a real political society.

Bringing the political to the level of the ordinary and the mundane, Dewey comes close to Marx while he lays out the idea of the common man and his role on implementing a creative democracy. Considered as a human habit rather than a set of institutional and formal arrangements, Dewey's democracy is grounded on the intelligence and creativity of men who should experience politics as part of their everyday life or, as he calls it, a "personal day-by-day working together with others" (1939: 342). This latter definition underlies the relevance of the idea of *cooperation*, even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual.

To cooperate means acting together with others in order to achieve a common end through common means. However, this common endeavor would be meaningless if those involved in it could not share the consequences of their actions. For this reason, Dewey sustains, "democracy is a reality only as it is indeed a commonplace of living" (1939a: 343). This common place of living receives the form of a community, a commonality of common men.

To learn to be human, says Dewey, is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community. Hence, "regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated

life. It is the idea of community life itself" (1927: 148). Democracy is prevented from being an utopian idea when it has the community as its basis.

Democracy must then begin at home; and its home is the neighborly community (1927: 213). It is in the community that one finds the common man: the man whose experience and activity are tied to groups, families, schools, factories, churches, and all forms of human association. It is in the community that people communicate and interact with each other, and thus share the consequences of their common activity towards the implementation of democracy in micro spheres of deliberation and participation.

Democracy is then the solidification of those endless possibilities of human experience and activity which are inherent to and only to the communal life. In this regard, democracy is a unitary whole that includes individual's potentialities and the capacities which are developed through cooperative activities carried on by the community. However, if democracy is a form of communal life that offers unlimited opportunities for the development of the individuality it is essential that individuals take part in the direction of their lives and in the life of the community in which they live.

Democracy should thus assure that each and every man take part into the formation of the individual and social values that are supposed to rule the common life. Therefore the individuality of the common man may be constituted through the community, while at the same time the sociability of the community as a whole may be formed through the individualization of each man considered in his singularity. There shall be an identification between the subject and his activity, between the common man and the communal life, between democracy and community.

In Dewey's community, self-realization turns out to be identified with self-government. Democracy no longer depends on a privileged space, a State separated from a civil society; it rather relies in a community that unifies the universal and the particular since it mixes the public and the private spheres of life. Democracy no longer depends on special institutions,



procedures or mechanisms; it can rather be practiced anywhere as a daily activity; it finds itself in any form of human association within the community. Democracy no longer depends on a privileged subject; it rather gains shape in the experience of human beings who share the consequences of their common practice towards a common life.

Today, just like Dewey has claimed in the 1930's, there is yet a present need to vigorously reassert the faith in the potentialities of human nature and the claim that democracy should always be allied with humanism. Though today this demand, or better this search for the common man, should not only take place in Dewey's north America, but also below in the continent, where politics requires a common man, a common action, a common politics and thus a common peace. The recognition of such a political subject whose nature asserts the universal and whose action preserves the particular is one that should substitute for those recent attempts to come up with a new name for the unchangeable human nature as it could solve the unfulfilled promises of politics.

A pragmatic democracy requires a theoretical move from institutions to practices, from language to experience, from decision to action, from authority to activity, from the extraordinary places and moments of democracy to the ordinary localities and temporalities that constantly shape and reshape human's everyday life. Democracy shall thus be an open, fallible, reflexive, revisable, local and human process. It shall be searched in the practices that resist institutionalization, in the small actions undertaken by singular human beings, in the empirical facts that constitute a common man's routine, in that experience that we may only call human.

Those claims, however normative, shade some light on the question of what philosophical pragmatism has to offer politics, or more particularly of how a pragmatic conception of democracy fits the Latin American context, especially Brazil where political stability and social justice has long been lacked. Among other things, philosophical pragmatism

provides politics with a solid justification for fallibilism, reflexivity, experimentalism, and practicalism.

Fallibilism allows policies and institutions to be revisable accordingly to values and beliefs which are as dynamic as human nature and experience. Reflexivity explain how policies and institutions once revisable let politics reflect upon itself, thus changing and improving through a process of self-criticism. Experimentalism accounts for politics being applied to new and different contexts, through new and different forms, considering diverse practices and experiences, objects and subjects previously placed outside the formal political system and the traditional political institutions. Finally, practicalism indicates a benefic relation between means and ends, through which, for example, one may combine liberal policies with the radical values of social justice.

An experimental approach to politics must be one that takes contextualism seriously. And this implies, besides the idea of experience, those of practice and facts. Those ideas, for its turn, allows for a material conception of democracy (what Dewey called democracy as an idea) and a factualist approach to politics (what Dewey called democracy as a way of life). A material conception of democracy is one that emphasizes facts instead of norms – or to put it in another way, it is one that provides facts with a normative force, so as to make the normative force of facts as a distinguished feature of a political pragmatism compromised with social justice.

Lastly, philosophical pragmatism provides politics with a practical approach that take consequentialism so seriously as to implies a forward-looking perspective to democracy, one that seeks to fulfill the social needs of a given society by anticipating the desirable consequences of certain policies, institutions, rules and decisions for a specific social context. A practical approach to politics is thus one that builds the future through the present, turning ends into means, and fulfilling the social demands of democracy.