

Conceptual Article

Elucidation of Richard Bernstein's Engaged Fallibilistic Pluralism as an Epistemic Framework for the Historiographical Reconstruction of the Sciences

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Abstract: This paper aims to elucidate the theoretical framework corresponding to Richard Bernstein's pragmatic turn through a diachronic reconstruction of his early and mature work. It employs a structured-qualitative reading, focusing on 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' as the central category of his thought. The relevance of this work lies in providing an epistemic scheme that can be applied in the historiographical reconstruction of deliberative praxis carried out by plural communities of research, particularly in the controversies inherent in the history of anthropology, considering the categories of 'juxtaposition' and 'critical constellation' of researchers.

Keywords: Bernstein; fallibilism; pluralism, pragmatism, engaged fallibilistic pluralism

1. Introduction

Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that originated in the United States during the last quarter of the 19th century, and is based on the so-called 'pragmatist maxim' formulated by Charles Peirce (1839-1914), according to which the meaning of a proposition has to be found in its practical consequences. In this sense, the term 'pragmatism' was popularised by William James (1842-1910), who used it during a speech in 1898 entitled "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results", delivered at the University of California (Berkeley). The third important figure in the classical pragmatist movement is John Dewey (1859-1952), whose extensive writings had a considerable impact on American intellectual life, in debates on education and democratic politics.

Meanwhile, in the 20th century there has been a resurgence of interest in pragmatism in so-called neo-pragmatist authors such as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Nicholas Rescher, Jürgen Habermas, Susan Haack, Robert Brandom and Cornel West. Thus, Richard Bernstein belongs to this group of contemporary philosophers who have taken an interest in the pragmatist problem, updating the debates.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper employs a structured-qualitative reading of Richard Bernstein's early and mature works, focusing on 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' as a category for reconstructing, in diachronic-historiographical terms, an epistemic-conceptual framework applicable to the historicisation of scientific controversies. Specifically, it focuses on controversies within the history of anthropology, using the categories of 'juxtaposition' and 'constellation', with which Bernstein identifies the critical and plural community of investigators as the principal epistemological unit of analysis in epistemology.

3. Results

The biographical reconstruction of the academic life of Richard Bernstein is based on the work of Roberto Frega (2014), in their interview with the philosopher, 'Interview with Richard J. Bernstein', published in the European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy; as well as the synthesis in The Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers (Shook, 2005) and Bernstein's own autobiography, titled "The Romance of Philosophy", first published in Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association (2007),

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and later in *Pragmatic Encounters* (2016).

This section is structured by outlining three periods in 3.1. The author's academic life, and 3.2. General description of Bernstein's work.

3.1. Reconstruction of Bernstein's Academic Life

3.1.1. Formation and Philosophical Initiation (1949-1958)

Richard Bernstein, the youngest of three siblings, was born on May 14, 1932, in Brooklyn, into the second generation of a family of Jewish Polish immigrants. He experienced, according to his autobiography "an intellectual awakening" (Bernstein, 2016, p. 14) at Midwood High School, one of New York's most prominent public high schools. Upon completing his studies, he was still too young to be drafted and fight in World War II – an event in which his older brother died – so he enrolled at the University of Chicago, applying from 1949 to 1951 to a liberal curriculum for advanced students structured around an interdisciplinary course in philosophy and history of Western science taught by Joseph Schwab: "From the time I arrived, I was reading Plato, Aristotle, Galileo, Darwin, Herodotus, Thucydides and many other great books. In the undergraduate college there was a negative attitude toward pragmatism. I don't recall ever reading any of the classical pragmatic thinkers" (Frega, 2014). In this propitious university environment, Bernstein wrote *Love and Friendship in Plato: A Study of the Lysis and the Phaedrus*. Some of his fellow students, Susan Sontag, Richard Rorty, George Steiner, Philip Roth and Mike Nichols, would later also become his philosophical interlocutors: "It was in Chicago that I discovered and fell in love with philosophy" (Bernstein, 2016, p. 14).

After graduating, at the age of 19, Bernstein returned to New York and, in order to complete his credits, applied to a course at Columbia University taught by Justus Buchler – who had obtained his doctorate in 1938 with the thesis *Charles Peirce's Empiricism*. Although this was his first encounter with pragmatist philosophy, his real interest only came in 1953, in the context of Yale University, which he attended on Rorty's recommendation: "I started my graduate studies at Yale in 1953. John E. Smith (who was then a young assistant professor) organized a small reading group dealing with John Dewey's *Experience and Nature*. This was a revelation for me. I discovered that Dewey was a far more interesting thinker than I had been led to believe. At the time there was a prevailing prejudice that pragmatism was little more than a fuzzy anticipation of logical positivism" (Frega, 2014).

There, the author wrote one of his first publications, *John Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience* (written in 1960 and published in 1961), in which he understands the distinctive character of classical pragmatism with respect to analytic philosophy, which should be read "as bold counter-move to the fashionable tendencies and trends in Anglo-American analytic philosophy at the time" (Shook, 2005, p. 216). During his stay at Yale, he encountered Hegel's work for the first time, through Antigone: "I spent hours reading the text over and over again until I had a breakthrough-like an epiphany. I experienced the power of Hegel. That seminar on Hegel changed my life" (Bernstein, 2016, p. 15). Along with his studies on Dewey, he was also influenced by Paul Weiss – from whom he learns what it means to be a true philosopher – and Wilfrid Sellars, from whom he understands how to employ the tools of analytic philosophy for the interpretation of the history of philosophy. The presence of Paul Weiss, editor of *Peirce's Collected Papers*, also brings him closer to the study of pragmatism.

Yale, for its part, was significant for Bernstein for its pluralist perspective and its resistance to the hegemony of analytic philosophy and logical empiricism; it was in this way that the philosopher distinguishes there between 'analytic ideology' and 'analytic philosophy', in order to extend the field of action of the former to the belief that philosophical analysis is the restrictive and exclusive way of practising philosophy.

3.1.2. Teaching and Philosophical Dialogues (1958-1989)

Having received his PhD from Yale (1958), he taught for a year at the Hebrew University in Israel, and on his return became assistant professor and editor (until 1971) of *The Review of Metaphysics* founded by Paul Weiss. In 1965, in a nationwide event, he is denied tenure, sparking a major student protest. So, he moved to Haverford College, a prestigious liberal arts college where she remained until 1989. At Haverford, Bernstein sees the opportunity to build a Philosophy Department with a pluralistic spirit, central to the structuring of a curriculum that offered courses on Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. In this period, Bernstein wrote his first book *John Dewey* (1966), followed by *Praxis and Action*

(1971), *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (1976), *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (1983) and *Philosophical Profiles* (1986); it is there that he recognised himself as a teacher:

In 1989 he was elected president of the Eastern Division of the APA (American Philosophical Association), at whose inauguration event Bernstein invited Derrida, and in which he delivered a famous speech entitled “Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds”: he synthesised the most significant themes of his pragmatist philosophy. That same year he was invited to teach at the New School for Social Research in New York City, an institution whose origins are radically influenced by pragmatism, and together with Agnes Heller and Reiner Schürmann he directed the reconstruction of the Philosophy Department and served as its chairman from 1989 to 2002. During this period he wrote *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (1992), *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (1996), *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (1998) and *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (2002).

3.2. General description of the work

Bernstein’s work is characterised here in consideration of the critical contributions proposed by Shook (2005), Greeve Davaney & Frisina (2006), Green (2014) and Craig & Morgan (2017). This section is structured around a general characterisation of Bernstein’s philosophical work and the way in which he has conducted it. First of all, it presents the: 3.2.1. Deliberative Ethos of the work, in which the purposes of Bernstein’s philosophical project are made explicit, strictly speaking: a) To self-correct and update the characteristic themes of classical pragmatism, and b) To go beyond Cartesian foundationalism. The section then concludes by naming the most frequent philosophical interlocutors in Bernstein’s work.

3.2.1. Deliberative Ethos of the Work

Shook (2005) Greeve Davaney & Frisina (2006), Green (2014) and Craig & Morgan (2017) concur in characterising Bernstein’s philosophy as a critical-reconstructive deliberative proposal that appeals to account for the ‘pragmatic turn’ in thought, on the basis of a revitalisation of the classical debates conducted by Peirce, James and Dewey, according to a *ethos* committed to fallibilist pluralism that attempts to a) Self-correct and update the characteristic themes of classical pragmatism; and b) to go beyond Cartesian foundationalism: “Bernstein’s philosophy is pragmatic insofar as it is committed to anti-foundationalism and the self-corrective character of inquiry; an irreducibly social understanding of subjectivity; fallibilism with regard to all cognitive, practical, and moral claims; and engaged pluralism in grappling with the varied approaches to philosophical questions and what counts as a philosophical question” (Shook, 2005, p. 221)

Bernstein’s work includes reflexions on philosophy of science and ethics, structured from a deliberative-pragmatist perspective, in an interdisciplinary conversational framework. In *The Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers* (Shook, 2005), Bernstein’s use of an immanent reconstructive-critique with ethical purpose is also made explicit as a general mode characterising his own philosophical practice.

Craig & Morgan (2017) for their part, interpret Haverford’s founding Quaker tradition as occupying a significant place in Bernstein’s understanding of the meaning of promoting the shaping of deliberative communities with pluralist *ethos* (p. XX). They also refer to the following passage from *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, in which Bernstein understands that: “A true ‘conversation’ -which is not to be confused with idle chatter or a violent babble of competing voices-[it] is an extended and open dialogue which presupposes a background of intersubjective agreements and a tacit sense of relevance” (Bernstein, 1982, p. 2). It is furthermore, in the preface to this work, where the philosopher warns that the recovery and clarification of the concepts and experiences linked to dialogue, deliberation and communication also presuppose, in the agonistic encounter, friendship, solidarity and erotic love.

Bernstein argues that he does not himself propose to build ‘bridges’ between different philosophical orientations, since “no single orientation or style of thinking has an exclusive possession of philosophic insight” (Bernstein, 1999, p. X), from which follows the practice of committed fallibilist pluralism as a *ethos* or ethical disposition that implies being open to the other in his radical otherness; by the way, Zambrana (2017) understands that: “Pluralism is an *ethos*, then, because it entails more than the recognition of difference. It involves self-reflection and the willingness to revise one’s deepest commitments or even to change one’s life” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 125). Therefore, dialogue in Bernstein’s work disposes to a pluralistic and fallibilist *ethos* that has two purposes:

a) Self-correcting and updating the characteristic themes of classical pragmatism: Bernstein considers as a general starting point for formulating the deliberative framework of his work the approaches of Peirce, James and Dewey, in order to articulate the ‘pragmatic turn’ in philosophy through dialogue with contemporary authors such as Wilfrid Sellars, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Alasdair Macintyre, Martin Heidegger, John McDowell, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Hannah Arendt, Hans Joas, Charles Taylor, Jeffrey Stout, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser and Robert Brandom, among others. Thus, in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* he believes that the classical pragmatists were ahead of their time, so that part of his academic work consisted in dialoguing with non-pragmatist authors in order to find affinities that would then broaden his own pragmatist orientation (Bernstein 2016, p. 24). Thus, along with Bernstein, philosophers such as Richard Rorty, John E. Smith, John J. McDermott, and John J. McDermott: “Understood in differing ways that classical pragmatism would need to be critically adjusted and collaboratively redeveloped to meet contemporary theoretical and practical needs in the sciences, politics, religion, culture, and daily living, employing for that purpose the same kind of open-ended conversational process that the original pragmatists developed to create their new philosophical framework” (Green, 2014, p. 2).

With the ‘pragmatic turn’ Bernstein has shown himself to be an active participant in revealing his own philosophy from a renewed vision of the classic themes of pragmatism, in order to satisfy the need to respond to contemporary issues: “Both Bernstein’s open and dialogical approach to multiple perspectives and his own constructive positions have encouraged his inclusion in a wide range of debates and conversations” (Greeve Davaney & Frisina, 2006, p. VIII).

b) Going beyond Cartesian foundationalism: Engaged fallibilistic pluralism requires overcoming what Bernstein calls ‘Cartesian anxiety’ and which entails the crystallisation of an attitude of methodical doubt, out of whose consequent fear the philosophical search for a foundation from which to build the general structure of knowledge is erected.

The pluralist ethos co-implicated in the dialogue that fosters a fallibilist commitment differs from Cartesian philosophical solipsism, which is rooted in the solitary and meditative resolution of mental experiments that exclude intersubjective conflict, and is then systematically nourished by a debilitating doubt. Thus, Bernsteinian pragmatist fallibilism does not lead to a radical scepticism that homogenises and denies the totality of beliefs; instead, the exorcism of ‘Cartesian anxiety’ allows us to avoid the belief that there is a need for an ultimate and infallible philosophical foundation.

3.2.2. *Philosophical Interlocutors*

Bernstein’s deliberative framework included Richard Rorty, Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida as his most frequent interlocutors. In 1972, he began an extensive dialogue with Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt, manifested firstly in the works of 1976 and 1983: “It is as if I, who started working in the pragmatic tradition and became increasingly interested in the Hegelian-Marxist legacy, encountered Habermas, who, starting with the Hegelian-Marxist legacy, was moving closer to the spirit of pragmatism” (Bernstein, 2016, p. 20).

Regarding his friendship with Habermas, Bernstein insists on the critique of the transcendental-Kantian character of the theory of communicative action and writes *Habermas and Modernity* (1985), a collection of essays in which he interprets the concept of modernity in the transcendental pragmatist philosophy of the German philosopher. Concerning Hannah Arendt, their first encounter took place during a six-hour meeting in Haverford: “And that was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until her death in 1975” (Bernstein, 2016, p. 22). Bernstein dedicates *Beyond...* to Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Rorty, and it is with Arendt that he especially dialogues in works such as *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (1996), *Radical Evil* (2002), *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11* (2006), and *Why Read Hannah Arendt Now?* (2018). In this sense, the author’s interest in issues related to religious identity and evil is emphasised: “His meditations on Hannah Arendt and Judaism exhibit sensitivity to the religious dimensions of the life of a self-proclaimed pariah” (Shook, 2005, p. 221). In this line of work, he publishes *Violence: Thinking without Banisters* (2013), a work in which he dialogues with Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon, and Jan Assmann.

On the other hand, he has published critical studies on Gadamer since 1968, especially regarding *Wahrheit und Methode* in the “Review of Metaphysics”: “During the time when Habermas and I taught our seminar in Dubrovnik, another seminar was given at the same

time dealing with phenomenology. Gadamer was a frequent visitor, and we had many discussions over a good bottle of wine in Dubrovnik. When Gadamer started his regular visits to the United States, he frequently visited Haverford. And I felt myself increasingly influenced by – although also critical of – his hermeneutical orientation” (Bernstein, 2016, p. 22). Then, from the studies on Gadamer, Bernstein makes explicit the relationships of identity and difference between the concept of ‘hermeneutical understanding’ and ‘pragmatist *phronesis*’.

By the 1970s, Bernstein began difficult readings of Derrida, with the help of his wife Carol; the difficulties were overcome with Derrida’s essays on Levinas: “I began to see that Derrida, from his earliest work, was preoccupied – indeed obsessed – with questions concerning ethics and responsibility. Subsequently, I wrote an essay, ‘Serious Play: The Ethical-Political Horizon of Jacques Derrida’” (Bernstein, 2016, p. 23). Bernstein’s recent work includes religious and psychoanalytic themes, explicit in *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (1998). However, the author continues his inquiry into pragmatism in *Ironic Life* (2016), directly referring to his friend Richard Rorty and Jonathan Lear, based on a reinterpretation of Socrates and Kierkegaard, Gregory Vlastos and Alexander Nehamas. In *Pragmatic Encounters* (2017), essays are compiled in which Bernstein deliberates with classical and contemporary pragmatists, as well as with Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt, or with Paul Ricoeur’s readings of Freud. That same year, *Taylor and Bernstein* (2017) was published, a work in which Daniel Gamper systematises the dialogue between both philosophers. Finally, in *Pragmatic Naturalism: John Dewey’s Living Legacy* (2020), he debates with Robert Brandom, John McDowell, Richard Rorty, Wilfrid Sellars, Peter Godfrey-Smith, Philip Kitcher, Bjorn Ramberg, David Macarthur, Steven Levine, Mark Johnson, Robert Sinclair, Huw Price, and Joseph Rouse in order to discuss Dewey’s naturalism.

In summary, Bernstein’s philosophical work is developed from a critical-reconstructive deliberative practice, committed to a pluralistic and fallibilistic ethos aimed at a) Self-correcting and updating the characteristic themes of classical pragmatism; and b) Going beyond Cartesian foundationalism.

4. Discussion

In this section a thematic articulation of the work, appealing to Hegelian philosophy as a key to interpret the meaning of the purposes a) and b), is carried out. Thus, it is taking into account the work of Zambrana (2017) and the pragmatist themes posited by Bernstein in his presidential address of 1988 to the American Philosophical Association, “Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds,” namely: 1. Anti-foundationalism and critique of Cartesianism, 2. Fallibilism, 3. Community of inquirers and sociability of practices, 4. Radical contingency, and 5. Irreducible plurality of perspectives and orientations. In *Pragmatic Encounters*, Bernstein (2016) unifies 4 and 5, renaming 5 as: The agent’s perspective and the continuity of theory and practice, and adds 6. Democracy as a way of life. According to Shook (2005), the Hegelian influence is evident in the period 1970-1980, as an example of the concomitant critique in the disputes between Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytic philosophy (Shook, 2005, p. 219). The presence of Hegel appears in *Praxis and Action* (1971), as well as in *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (1976) and *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (1983), that is, during his tenure at Haverford College (1965-1989). Rocío Zambrana (2017) agrees with this assessment, and adds: “You will find no books on Hegel among Richard Bernstein’s long list of publications, yet Hegel is a constant figure in Bernstein’s work” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 123). In this way, Hegel would intercede in 4.1. Bernstein’s critique of absolute dichotomies and 4.2. The unity of theory and *praxis*.

4.1. Bernstein’s Critique of Absolute Dichotomies

4.1.1. Unstable Dialectic

Shook (2005, p. 219) understands that the Hegelian influence is particularly evident in *Praxis and Action* (1971), a work in which Bernstein understands action from the Hegelian perspective of Marx. Zambrana (2017), on the other hand, identifies that Bernstein’s use of Hegel permeates the treatment of anti-foundationalism, fallibilism, the formation of critical communities (themes 1, 2, and 3) and the inescapability of contingency and pluralism (theme 4/5), especially in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* and *The Pragmatic Turn*: “In ‘Hegel and Pragmatism’ chapter 4 of *The Pragmatic Turn*, Bernstein tracks Hegel’s influence on what can roughly be seen as three generations of pragmatists. The first generation is comprised, among others, of Peirce, Dewey, and James; the second generation is represented by Wilfred Sellars; and the third generation is developed by John McDowell and Robert Brandom (“the

Pittsburgh Hegelians”) (Zambrana, 2017, p. 130).

Bernstein conceives Hegelian philosophy as a substantive key when articulating ‘the pragmatic turn’ around the notion of ‘Cartesian anxiety’ as a critical source of foundationalism that dichotomises theoretical and practical philosophy in absolute terms. According to Zambrana, “Bernstein reads Hegel against himself in light of his pragmatist commitments” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 131); and unlike the classical pragmatists, who sought to recover from Hegel “the sense of life, dynamism, and especially the vision of interrelated organic reality” (Bernstein, 2013, p. 101), Bernstein’s anti-foundationalism assumes the philosophical possibility of formulating a ‘dialectic without *Aufhebung*’ that is, without the Hegelian integrative moment consisting of the reductive ‘negation of the negation’ to then “do justice to both elements, without succumbing to the illusion that they can finally be integrated” in a dialectical – Hegelian and anti-Hegelian – form in which the totalising reconciliation of opposites does not occur.

This *unstable dialectic* is concomitant with the pluralistic and fallibilistic *ethos* that characterises the way Bernstein himself practises philosophy, according to Shook (2005, p. 219) and from which it is then possible to think about the dialectical articulation between theory and reason.

4.1.2. *Non-Representational Perspective of Knowledge*

Bernstein believes that the correspondence theory of truth, framed within the foundationalist dichotomy between idealism and empiricism, is susceptible to being overcome through the readings of Hegel carried out by the second and third generation of pragmatists. Therefore, the philosopher acknowledges the validity of Sellars’ critique of the so-called ‘myth of the given’. In this sense, McDowell argues that a review of the absolute terms corresponding to idealism or coherentism as well as Sellars’ ‘myth of the given’ makes it possible to critique the ontological difference between mind and world. From Bernstein’s perspective, both extremes, idealism and empiricism, are subjected to foundationalism: “For Sellars and Brandom, what is needed is an inferential, non-representational account of knowledge. Brandom takes this thought further by arguing that such inferential articulation – such mediation – is a matter of social practices” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 132). Thus, according to Brandom’s Hegelian interpretation, conceptual content is no longer given around realist criteria of validation, but depends on the recognition of others, so that argumentation is inscribed within the framework of a communal historical-conceptual articulation “Now, Brandom’s account not only stresses the significance of history and sociality for accounts of mind and world. It also articulates a revisionist view of knowledge. Conceptual content is articulated by revisions made in response to social-historical developments.” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 133). Hence, the locus of validation of arguments is determined by a historical-social-communal process in which conceptual content is exchanged.

The critique of exclusive dichotomies upheld in foundationalism suggests the possibility of postulating a “nonfoundational self-corrective conception of human inquiry based upon an understanding of how human agents are formed by, and actively participate in shaping, normative social practices” (Bernstein, 2010, p. X). This rejection of foundationalism would entail a form of fallibilism subject to intersubjective exchange of arguments and evidence, that is, to the formation of plural deliberative communities.

4.2. *The Unity of Theory and Praxis*

Zambrana (2017) understands that theme 4/5, Radical Contingency and Irreducible Plurality of Perspectives and Orientations, can be understood through *Praxis and Action* (1971) and *The New Constellation* (1991): “In both discussions, the promise of Hegel’s thought are made clear in light of its deep limitations. These limitations are seen as crucial provocations. Indeed, in these discussions we see that, although Hegel’s texts help us think through non-foundationalism, fallibilism, and a community of inquiry, they fail to do justice to the last two critical gestures of philosophical pluralism – contingency and plurality” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 133) In *Praxis and Action* Bernstein (1971) reconstructs the theoretical proposals of Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and positivism in the 19th and 20th centuries, in order to articulate a contemporary pragmatist perspective on action: “Bernstein remarks that each of these strands of philosophical inquiry can be combined to enlighten and deepen the others” (Shook 2005, p. 219). Zambrana (2017) interprets that the work is an exemplary demonstration of Bernstein’s pluralism, to the extent that it ‘juxtaposes’ different perspectives to reveal the existing tensions between them and thus elucidate the phenomenon of praxis and action.

4.2.1. *Self-Reflective Activity of the Geist*

Bernstein interprets in *Praxis and Action* that the Hegelian *Geist* is constituted as self-created activity, from which it is possible to overcome the foundationalist dichotomy between idealism and empiricism, to the extent that the activity of the *Geist* is negativity that externalises itself in action, as the actualisation or concretisation of an intention: the *Geist* is the activity and, therefore, the intelligibility of things themselves that self-determine, independently of any externality; the *Geist* manifests itself in the material of the world, thus, from here, Bernstein “provocatively concludes that Hegel’s idealism can be understood as a form of materialism” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 134). Bernstein further interprets that the externalised concretisation of intentions in the form of action, assumed in the dialectic between potentiality (at rest) and actualisation (in motion), articulates the unity of theory and practice.

4.2.2. *Constellations, Pluralism, and Fallibilism*

After examining the self-reflective unity of theory and action, Zambrana (2017) turns to *The New Constellation* (1992), a work in which Bernstein evaluates the idealism and necessity attributed to Hegelian dialectic and, especially, to *Aufhebung*. Then, if in *Praxis and Action* (1971) the philosopher postulates an unstable *both/and* dialectic, in the 1992 work this idea is a condition of possibility not only for understanding non-foundationalism, fallibilism, and the formation of critical communities of inquiry, but also for accounting for radical contingency and irreducible plurality of perspectives and orientations (themes 4/5). Given that in Hegel’s modern philosophy, the *Geist* reaches the moment of reconciliation of opposites through the negation of difference itself (in fact, of any rupture *and/or* fracture), and in contrast, postmodern philosophy establishes the primacy of fragmentation, particularity, and contingency against any form of absolute totalization. Thus, Bernstein will agree with postmodern philosophy regarding contingency and plurality, without leading to forms of skeptical relativism: “Focus on context, specificity and locality does not mean we can avoid facing up to our affirmations – especially when they are challenged. For even if one maintains all effective critique must be local and specific, we still have to face up to what we are affirming when we engage in critique.” (Bernstein, 1991, p. 318). Therefore, the pragmatist ethos involves using Hegel’s distinction between ‘abstract negation’ and ‘determinate negation’; and while the former criticizes concepts without understanding the agonistic activity itself with which it exclusively seeks the annihilation of the other (*difference*, a static binary logic), ‘determinate negation’ on the other hand, is directed towards a specific standpoint “It leads to a further determination, since it articulates the matter at hand concretely, in light of what has been rejected and overcome. Determinate negation is insightful since it comprehends the presuppositions and implications of its own activity” (Zambrana, 2017, p. 136). Abstract negation presupposes fixed binary oppositions, whereas determinate negation grasps the unstable relationship itself between the oppositions, based on the *both/and* dialectic, thus affirming contingency and plurality, which leads Bernstein to formulate the concept of “constellation”: “This revisionary understanding of dialectics leads Bernstein to the notion of constellation, a concept originally developed by Walter Benjamin and TW Adorno. Constellation involves the juxtaposition of opposites. Now, constellations construct meaningful relations between stars in light of their spatial proximity. In a constellation, then, the relation between stars is not one of necessity. It is a matter of contingency. However, in allowing each star to shine in its singularity, a constellation allows each star to appear in its truth” (Bernstein, 2017, p. 136)

The constellation does justice to a pluralistic understanding in which particular elements are irreducible to a mode of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, as the unstable character of dialectics – as well as of oppositions – appeals to responsibility as the pragmatist ethos through which it is possible to “think and act in the ‘in-between’ interstices of forced reconciliations and radical dispersion” (Bernstein, 1992, p. 36), involving participants in a community of inquirers as first persons, open to the negative determination that dialogue entails, in a deliberative framework that revises arguments. With Shook (2005), the critical-reconstructive conversational framework of Bernstein’s work is described, which occurs through the exposition of the arguments of a particular interlocutor and the consequent explication of their possible tensions, biases, resistances, or denials, based on the exercise of a dialectic without *Aufhebung*. This theoretical proposal, supported by a reading with/against Hegel, is practiced by Bernstein himself, who “brings into conversation widely separated philosophical positions and schools, arguing that they share much more than their respective practitioners think, and that they differ in ways to which they are equally blind” (Shook, 2005, p. 219).

5. Conclusions

Bernstein's pragmatist philosophy can be an appropriate epistemic framework for interpreting the 'paradigmatic juxtaposition' within the controversies of plural communities of scholars, particularly those that have arisen in the history of modern anthropology. Indeed, the 'constellation of researchers' presupposes not only the epistemological and methodological pluralism with which they attempt to resolve disputes, but also the fallibilism by which critical communities of researchers attempt to regularise their own research practices. This neo-pragmatist revision of Bernstein institutes conflict as a Hegelian dimension of conservation of scientific communities, while situating them temporally and spatially in a social-historical scope that gives meaning to their actual realisations.

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