

From calculation to deliberation: the contemporaneity of Dewey

Abstract

Rather aptly given the current situation, the word crisis comes from Ancient Greek κρίσις which can be translated as ‘power of distinguishing’ and is related to modern κρίνω which means ‘to pick out’. This is apt because the pandemic of 2020 has exposed the limitation of approaches to social governance premised on calculation and revealed the necessity to ‘pick’ between different qualitative options, with the - some would argue false - choice between either saving lives or the economy being the most high profile example. This has brought into relief something suppressed by the calculation approach, namely the need to adjudicate between multiple and competing value orientations in public life. Whether in the guise of Weber’s ‘warring gods’ (1978), Berlin’s value pluralism (2002), or Boltanski and Thevenot’s many orders of worth and justification (2006) - value dilemmas are now fully back in the public domain. With this, an alternative way of decision making in the public domain is needed, one that does not revert back to mere politics and subjective decisions. This article turns to the writings of John Dewey (1996) to look for alternatives. It shows that the model of deliberative inquiry found in Dewey, even though not without its own challenges, presents a viable option to replace metrics-based valuation approaches, without falling back on the whimsy of political judgement. This suggests that Dewey is not just contemporaneous, but that translating his insights into action could not be more urgent.

Keywords: deliberation, calculation, value judgement, commensurability, Pragmatism, Dewey

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Introduction

The events that unfolded in 2020 following the outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic have thrown into sharp relief the realisation brewing for some time now, namely that social governance and the system of “value management” premised on calculation are not viable as a way of making decisions in the public domain. Admittedly, calculation has been an object of critique for a while - be it in relation to claims about economic rationality’s encroaching upon the social (Habermas 2015) or fears about algorithmic manipulation of the social (O’Neil 2016). And yet, the neoliberal model of governance has remained dominant (Davies 2017). Could it be that one of the ‘good’ things to come out of the pandemic will be alternatives to the calculation of the social?

The last few months witnessed a resurgence - at least on the level of rhetoric - in policy “following the science” with decisions taken “on the basis of a rigorous analysis of the evidence” and with “dispassionate” calculation informing politics. However, soon the blatant discrepancies between the health outcomes and the governmental guidance issued in different countries led to questions about what it means to rely on scientific modelling (Meek 2020). While some argued it to be a false dilemma, the debates whether economic interests should be prioritised over the benefits of ‘locking up’ – presented a range of choices that could not be resolved scientifically (Wolf 2020). The vaccine rollouts in individual countries and the attempts to secure one’s ‘nations interests’ resembled more a political squabble rather than a cold-headed calculation - it certainly was not a textbook case of multilateral cooperation (Roháč 2021). A year later or so, further development compound the demise of technocracy in decision making. Paradoxically, even if overseen by technocrats, the recent measures to revive the economy, such as Biden’s stimulus package, are nothing but political (Tooze 2021). Recent events have made apparent that ‘everything is political’ as Paul Krugman once remarked in his Opinion piece for The New York Times (Krugman 2003).

The argument of this article is that the Covid 19 pandemic forces upon the political class - and other decision makers not immediately visible in the corridors of power - the need to compare and to adjudicate between radically different orders of worth and registers of value (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006; Boltanski, Chiapello and Elliott 2005). In other words, what is at issue is not just magnitudes to calculate but value orientations to choose; what is apparent is that decision-making requires the weighing of purposes not just the ranking of sizes. The realisation that people value things for different and often opposing reasons - is nothing new. This is just a new iteration of what Max Weber called the ‘war of gods’ (Weber 1978 [1922]). And yet, what is new is the situation and the intensity of the realisation that decision-making is about weighing different purposes. In fact, much of the “value management” and - by extension - social governance in the 20th century were concerned with evading and concealing this. Instrumental rationalities and technocratic decision-making looked up to calculation to offer an alternative to politics. From Weber, through Hayek, to new forms of managing social relations through the digital – calculation has become a way of managing the social and a social process in its own right. Now this has been exposed and, the argument goes, undermined.

This article argues that recent events demonstrate the limitations of calculation as a way of decision making in the public domain and asks whether a return to the whimsy of political judgement is the only way forward. In response, it suggests that the Pragmatic approach to

valuation and the writings of John Dewey specifically can offer a solution to the current predicament without reverting to the atavistic models where the subjectivity of the political class is without any checks and constraints. Thus, without giving into the subjectivities of purely political judgements and staying clear of technocratic solutions, Dewey's deliberation presents an answer to social action coordination and also, a commitment to a certain 'way of living' (Dewey 1996, LW 14: 225-26). Even though deliberation comes with its own problems, it is uniquely well placed to cope with the multiple purposes and value pluralism, which – the last few months revealed – can no longer be 'smoothed over' by the calculating paradigm. This suggests that Dewey is not just contemporaneous but that translating his insights into action could not be more urgent.

Quantification, commensurability, calculation

Many - some would say most (Zelizer 1994, 2000) - things can be calculated. This, as described below, is due to the fact that calculation has effectively served for a while as the cornerstone of modern societies (Deringer 2018; Desrosieres 1998). It has become a method of decision making, certainly in the allocation of public funding but also beyond in that, through Weberian instrumental rationality, it has colonised the social by presenting itself as a way of deciding the course of social action that is not only more efficient (Taylor 2004) but also, paradoxically, more democratic (see the section discussing the market below).

Important in this process was the establishment of statistical science in the 19th century (Desrosieres 1998) and the solidification of the dominant place of economics vis-à-vis politics (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009), but as Diaz-Bone and Didier point out, there were a number of developments that came to coincide:

The establishment of the metric system in Europe in the 19th century, the upcoming of industrial production, the unification of currencies, the processes of nation building and of internationalization promoted the importance of quantitative information, which are endowed with a huge scope in space and time, which also facilitate comparisons between units and points in time (Porter 1995; Desrosières 1998, 2008, 2008a, 2014; Thévenot 1984; Espeland and Stevens 1998, 2008) (Diaz-Bone and Didier 2016:8).

Facilitating comparison is the key phrase here. The very idea of calculation requires some form of commensurability and typically presupposes quantification.

Quantification describes the replacement of entities with numerical surrogates. Espeland and Stevens define it as 'the production and communication of numbers' (Espeland and Stevens 2008: 401). And yet, in spite of this deceptively simple formulation, Espeland and Stevens (2007, 1998), Espeland and Sauder (2007), Thévenot (2009), Fourcade (2016) and others have shown that quantification is a complex process involving distinctive decisions over which entities should be abstracted and how these new units of analysis come to be defined (to use Fourcade's terminology 'nominalised'). Marx has already observed how commodification, which is essentially a cardinalisation process can make quantities appear as if they were independently existing entities (cf. Marx 1990 [1867]) in the recent years, Fourcade and others have shown how the process of ordinalisation – ranking and ordering – has become increasingly dominant in the 'digitised' societies (see the quote from Fourcade below). Ordinalisation plays a crucial role in creating commensurability..

Commensuration is defined as ‘the comparison of different entities according to a common metric’ (Espeland and Stevens 1998: 331). The chief purpose of commensuration is to create a specific relationship between objects that transforms all difference into quantity, thereby erasing any sources of qualitative variation. Quantification is useful in this regard with numbers giving the common currency. To this end, different commensuration devices and operations have been established. The examples given by Espeland and Stevenson are:

Common forms of commensuration include the prices that assess the value of goods and services, votes that indicate political preferences, scores that evaluate the quality of wine or water, and standardized tests that assess ability or capacity (2008:408).

Commensuration thus typically involves quantification but, as Callon and Muniesa argue, calculation needs not involve numbers even if it relies on commensurability.

Calculating does not necessarily mean performing mathematical or even numerical operations (Lave 1988). Calculation starts by establishing distinctions between things or states of the world, and by imagining and estimating courses of action associated with those things or with those states as well as their consequences (2005: 1231).

Callon and Muniesa describe calculation as a three-step process in which entities are detached from their original contexts and grouped in the same frame, often by being associated with surrogate symbols; the surrogates are then subjected to manipulations and transformation; and finally, calculated with the results extracted as the final product (Callon and Muniesa 2005: 1231).

Needless to say, each of these terms merits a separate paper. The point of this brief consideration is merely to show how calculation, quantification and commensuration are not some abstract, theoretical constructs but presuppose operating on the social.

Calculating as a basis for managing the social

Taken together, calculation, quantification and commensuration are the foundation for how the market and the modern state are imagined to operate (Callon and Muniesa 2005, Davies 2020). To start, they set – or at least, used to set - the terms for policy making. For instance, the Green Book - the UK Treasury’s technical guidance on how public expenditure decisions should be made - is fundamentally an exercise in calculation, quantification and commensuration. It presents public funding not as a matter of political, or ethical, choices but as a technocratic exercise.

Andy Stirling once remarked that ‘it is this fixation on instruments of control (rather than the normative ends to which they might be hoped to lead), that arguably make Modernity so uncaring’ (Stirling 2019:4). The most classical exposition of this is that of Weberian instrumentality. The essence of instrumental reason is that it presupposes that the calculation of means, independently of any consideration of the ends, can be a foundation for action (Weber 1978 [1922]). For Weber a redeeming feature of instrumentality in policy making was that it enabled policies that effectively put safety breaks on the decision making undertaken by the aristocratic autocrats and self-interested political elites. But this was less relevant from the point of view of Frederick Winslow Taylor, who has been credited with turning the idea of instrumentality into scientific management (Kanigel 1997). The

overarching ambition for Taylor was maximising efficiency through performance management, irrespective of the substantive ends to be achieved.

The embrace of instrumental calculation as an action co-ordinating mechanism has led to a sort of pathology of the process of social development. In the terminology used by Habermas, instrumental reason makes it possible for the subsystems steered by calculation, namely the market economy and the administrative state, to gain autonomy. With the differentiation of the systems of the capitalist market and the bureaucratic state apparatus, the logic of these subsystems becomes increasingly more and more detached from the social structures through which social integration takes place - what Habermas refers to as the 'uncoupling' of the system and the lifeworld, where the latter is characterised in terms of 'coming about through the consensus of those involved', the former 'through functional interconnections of action' (Habermas 1984: 187). Effectively, these complexes of purpose-rational action escape the 'intuitive knowledge' of everyday communicative practice. Subsequently, means-ends calculations replace substantive/normative considerations concerned with the evaluation of the chosen ends from the point of view of the lifeworld. This pathology is further aggravated by the impoverishment of everyday life which ensues with the growing specialisation and expertise in knowledge production (Habermas 1990). The key point is that, uncoupled from the marginalised communicative practice, calculation becomes the means of organising the social without much oversight. This in turn fuels the need for instruments capable of commensurating value orientations and performing calculations.

The market as a supreme commensuration device

Thus far this article has focused on the definitions and presuppositions of calculation, but little has been said about the actual 'manipulations and transformations' that are the core of the process. This is because, ultimately, what 'algorithms' are chosen makes no difference as long as some form of calculating is in place. The calculations performed by and in the market provide a good illustration of this.

There has never been a pretence that the mechanism of market exchange offer 'realistic' predictions - what matters is that they offer a reliable technocratic management solution. As a number of commentators have pointed out, Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek were not attracted to the markets because they 'worked' in the sense of producing better welfare outcomes (Davies 2014). Rather, they championed the markets as a way of supplanting the need for political decision making (the parallel with how Weber viewed instrumental rationality should be apparent). And so, for Mises and Hayek, economic calculations (including the price system of the market) were viewed as safer, more transparent and more honest than political decision-making. Competition became the ultimate mechanism of selection where decisions can be reached through ranking and rating only, without any 'arbitrary impurities' of qualitative considerations. What is at issue is a certain *modus operandi* - one that cuts across multiple domains of human action.

It is in this sense that David Harvey argues that neoliberalism looks at the mechanisms of market exchange as 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs' (Harvey 2005:3). Similarly, for Foucault, rather than anything specifically to do with the economy and the markets, what is at issue in neoliberalism is governance and governmentality. Governmentality is here understood as 'the conduct of conduct': the application of technologies, rationalities and discursive structures to

steer how subjects behave in order to get them to re-enact specific subject positions (Foucault 1982). Paradoxically given Hayek's and von Mises's claims to transparency, the 'rules' of conduct are not explicit - in fact, under neoliberalism they remain deliberately hidden. What matters is that calculations can be performed with ease and not be unduly interrogated.

The commensuration potential of big data

Price is extremely useful in terms of creating one-dimensional scales to facilitate calculation, but there are other equivalencing devices. Under the spell of neoliberalisation and aided by the emergence of very large data sets (Anderson 2016) affects, moods and sentiments have acquired the potential to be turned into ranking devices. For instance, Adam Arvidsson's 'general sentiment' – an on-line value circulation domain based on reputation and peer-group esteem (Arvidsson 2011) - is a good illustration of how equivalencing in valuation can be achieved through different means. In Arvidsson's words:

A common criterion for the measurement of affective investments is forming, based on the new abstract or General Sentiment that is emerging as a new 'general equivalent' as a consequence of the present remediation of communicative relations, primarily throughout the diffusion of social media (Arvidsson 2011: 39).

Arvidsson and colleagues have claimed that this provides a means for challenging capitalism and gives a foundation for a new ethical economy (Arvidsson, Bauwens and Peitersen 2008). Thus far, the evidence suggests however that social media offers just new forms of consumer insight through 'sentiment analysis' and pattern mapping of 'likes' (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). Rather than intimating new and ethical economies, the rise of big data analytics only strengthens the stronghold of the old form of corporate capitalism. In the words of Fourcade:

Today, more and more aspects of social life - from personal connections to creditworthiness to the command of language - are amenable to ordinal quantification, crowd-sourced from behavioral traces left in opaque data infrastructures. The promise, of course, is that one day these traces (state records, market records, social media records) may converge to produce an ostensibly ratable self—a possibility that Kieran Healy and I (Fourcade and Healy 2016) identify as a specific form of capital: übercapital (Fourcade 2016: 190).

Ordinal quantification, as a way of ranking, is a way of establishing relations and ultimately sorting into hierarchies. It paves the way for organising the structures of social interactions. In this sense, there is a potential for big data analysis to surpass the market and establish commensuration and calculation in the one field that arguably managed to escape the market – the value of human life.

Calculation: its success and its discontents

Calculation is attractive because it is efficient, as indeed already noted by Weber and Taylor. Metrics-based approaches are 'are ways of making complex arrays of data and information manageable in decision-making contexts, of taking numerous issues and agencies into account'. (Davies 2006:7). Moreover, as Weber observed, calculation – and by extension technocracy - can be a way of safeguarding modern policy from the despotic and oligarchical abuse that characterised much of past monarchies when the subjectivity of the ruler was kept

unchecked by any independent measures (Weber 1978). Calculation however comes at a price – the mastery of sizes means agnosticism with respect to qualities.

This problem is not new. This is the core of the so called ‘Parsonian pact’ allegedly struck back in the 1950s between sociologists and economists. According to the pact, the way value and values are studied had to be divided up: ‘on the one hand, moral and philosophical approaches have dealt with values without measurement; on the other hand, management science and economics approaches have provided mathematic tools for measuring value in organisations and markets’ (Kjellberg, et al. 2013: 15; see also Stark 2009). The former attend to purposes, the latter focus on magnitudes alone. What has been the case in the academic discourse for a while is now palpably imprinted onto the reality of decision making in the public domain.

Calculations are inevitably reductive: they focus on some dimensions of what is calculated while making others invisible; they translate objects into units that can be presented as commensurable while ignoring some fundamental qualitative differences. As Davies puts it, ‘such procedures turn what Latour would characterise as the risky attachments and tangled objects that embody a ‘matter of concern’ into a smooth object, a ‘matter of fact’, just as the objects that science policy is having to consider present new and more complex entanglements’ (Latour 2004) (Davies 2006: 8). This applies as much to the standard technical appraisal processes used by governments such as cost-benefit analysis (as mentioned in relation to the Green Book) as to the multi-criteria approaches which allow for considerations other than financial to enter the analysis, but still manipulate information with the intention of achieving the most efficiently-calculable aggregates and rankings (see Stirling 2005). As sketched above, big data and digital technologies have the potential to take calculation to a yet unprecedented level. Indeed, as recently articulated by a number of concerned public intellectuals, there are worries whether democracy can ‘Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence’ (Helbing et al. 2019).

This poses a dilemma: given the price paid for the efficiency and management gains that come with calculation – should we be pleased to see this model exposed and undermined by the recent events, as suggested in the opening section of this paper? More evocatively, if it is apparent that calculation does not work – what alternatives are open to us short of regressing into pure politics?

In search for alternatives to calculation (and politics)

There has been growing interest in Pragmatism and pragmatic approaches to valuation and Dewey specifically (Lamont 2012; Antal, Hutter and Stark 2015; Heinich, 2020). There are a number of reasons for this, but the one that motivates the present article is that Dewey offers a compelling practical solution to the current predicament: a method of reaching value decisions without resorting to the reductivism of calculation and while staying clear of the subjective preferences of - more and less - enlightened despots.

Dewey was first and foremost interested in action and viewed knowledge as a by-product of adaptation to acting in specific environments. (Dewey 1996, MW 8:443). As he puts it in relation to value judgments specifically:

The situation in which judgement of value is required is not mental, much less fanciful. It is existential, but it exists as something whose good or value resides (first)

in something to be attained in action and (secondly) whose value both as an idea and as existence depends upon judgement on what to do (Dewey 1996 MW 8:33).

In *The Logic of Judgments of Practice* (quoted above), *Theory of Valuation* and elsewhere (1996, LW 13) Dewey emphasises that practical judgments are different in their form from theoretical judgements. Notably, they are geared towards future actions, based on assessment of desired outcomes and means-ends reasoning, and grounded in empirical inquiry. In rudimentary terms, practical judgement consists in converting private preferences into public orientations. To use Dewey's terminology, through a situated and socially mediated process, 'prizings' (i.e., what is subjectively valued or desired) can be vindicated to the status of publicly shared values (i.e., what is objectively valuable or desirable). To elucidate this, Dewey distinguishes two uses of the term 'value': prizing or esteeming in the sense of holding something precious; second, assigning value, appraising and evaluating (Dewey 1996, MW 14:83, cf. Vatin, 2013).

The convergence and conversion of individual responses into collective reactions are fundamental to Dewey's inquiry, even though the actual balance between the individual import and collective mediation are not entirely resolved. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey defines ethical deliberation as 'a dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing lines of action' (Dewey 1996, LW 14:132). Echoing an argument also made by Hannah Arendt, Dewey claims that the presupposition of deliberation is an initial, temporary detachment followed by the imagining of possible consequences which is prerequisite to deciding on the most defensible line of action. In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey however stresses the importance of testing value judgements in lived experiences and in communication with others. *Liberalism and Social Action* and *Freedom and Culture* further vindicate the view that while reflection is necessary to valuing, it is not sufficient: deliberation cannot be monological but it can only succeed through being dialogical - in other words, public. As the next section discusses, this ambivalence regarding where the individual and collective meet is echoed in modern day approaches to deliberation.

Setting aside the issue of balancing individual and collective responses, Dewey's inquiry rests on a number of clearly defined steps: 1. Identify the problem 2. Plan possible solutions 3. Evaluate and test the various solutions 4. Decide on a mutually acceptable solution 5. Implement the solution 6. Evaluate the solution (Ralston 2010: 27-28). Even though the objective of inquiry in question is to improve value judgments, rather than to explain phenomena, Dewey's method of inquiry follows the pattern of experimental inquiry in positive science. This, according to commentators such as H.C. Boyte, is another problematic feature of Dewey's approach in that, by equating 'the ideal human agent [with] the citizen scientist', Dewey is said to streamline the method and to pre-empt the content of deliberations (Boyte 2017:28). This criticism however, as argued in the next section, is not fully warranted.

Deliberation as social action coordination

Deliberation is a well-established topic in political science and theory and there are many different accounts (Habermas 1996; Benhabib 1996; Cohen 1989; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Fishkin 2009; Mansbridge et al. 2006). Fundamentally, 'deliberation is the free, equal and open-minded dialogue about a matter of public concern among anyone affected by the issue' (Huddy et al 2013:3). What is important is that the discussion in question is norm-governed, to use Joshua Cohen's way of putting this. This means that those participating have

to adhere to certain rules. The details are disputed. A more demanding approach would see deliberation as communication that is ‘fully informed, rational, truthful, oriented towards the common good, egalitarian and respectful, and based on public reasons’ (Bächtiger et al 2018: 5). Some definitions of deliberation are formal and procedural in this way (e.g., Habermas’s ideal speech situation is postulated as an ideal) but some capture the actual conditions and describe the process one can expect to witness and experience when deliberating (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2006). What is also important to appreciate is that many proponents argue that deliberation can produce legitimate outcomes without consensus (Gutmann and Thompson 1996), that through dissent (Benhabib 1996) and agonism (Mouffe 2000) deliberation can enhance democracy itself. Indeed, the last decade saw active experimentations with the ‘idea of deliberative democracy as a practical, problem-solving, and world-building activity’ (Barker et al 2012: 14). This very much in response to criticisms – made in particular in relation to the preference-based model associated with Fishkin and the rational proceduralist models credited to Habermas and Rawls – that deliberation has been turned too much into a reified, rule-governed process removed from everyday life and divorced from action (Barker et al 2012). Dewey becomes relevant in this context.

While at different points in his career Dewey gave different emphasis to the role of individual reflection and collective interaction, Dewey is keen to stress how self-reflection is subservient to deliberation in that it enables learning which can be subsequently fed back into the collective process. In that, it could be suggested, Dewey anticipates those aspects of deliberative methods that stress that the revision of one’s own beliefs and more clarity about the basis of one’s own position can be a valuable outcome of deliberation, even in absence of reaching consensus (see Gutmann and Thompson 1996). Thus, *The Public and Its Problems* provides a canvas for democratic deliberation as a robust form of social action co-ordination and a way of turning private preferences into collective concerns through actual face-to-face engagement. Indeed, it is in this context that Dewey counters the allegation that his inquiry is excessively scientific in its method. As Dewey puts this point in his own words: ‘Systematic and continuous inquiry . . . and its results are but tools after all. Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take’ (Dewey 1996, LW 2:371).

Here it is worth observing that Dewey’s method of inquiry is not just contemporaneous but also radical. For instance, Dewey notes that deliberation is not exhausted by dialogue because only ‘[s]ome people deliberate by dialogue’. In that Dewey anticipates the possibility of opening up the deliberative process to other forms of argumentation and imaginative agency, perhaps including visualisations, storytelling, and expressions of emotion as long as these can be interpreted and understood by interlocutors (Sanders 1997, Young 1996). The most radical suggestion coming from Dewey concerns not pre-judging what constitutes a matter of public concern. Contrary to the allegation of H.C. Boyte (Boyte 2017) Dewey recognises that social problems are moral problems which involve conflicts of value. These issues cannot be ‘bracketed’ but form the core of deliberation (Gouinlock 1978:225). This explains why Dewey’s discussion of valuation is couched in the vocabulary of moral principles and ethical rights (Shook 2004). Thus, rather than draining ‘politics’ out of deliberation, Dewey paves a way for ‘the process of forming, reforming, and transforming preferences and opinions through civil dialogue and widespread public participation’ (Barker et al 2012: 6), provided that the basic principles of fairness, respect and open-mindedness are observed.

Concluding remarks

Isaiah Berlin remarked on a number of occasions that tensions between different value orientations were inevitable. He observed that liberty can conflict with equality, justice with empathy, love with fairness, sense of obligation with independence and so on; and he wrote that ‘these collisions of values are of the essence of what they are and what we are’ (2002, 213; 1990, 13). Dewey too - as suggested above – was well aware of this. This ‘fact of life’ presents a fundamental challenge for the approaches to social governance premised on calculation which have been successful in the last hundred years. Calculation’s drive to one-dimensionality is fundamentally at odds with the plurality of value orientations manifested in daily experience - and the Corona virus pandemic, this article argued, exposed this. It is not clear whether we are witnessing the demise of ‘the audit society’ (Power 1997), ‘the metricisation agenda’ (Beer 2016), the ‘black box society’ (Pasquale 2015), to name just some tropes – it is too early to tell. Assuming that the viability of the social governance model premised on calculation got undermined, this opens up questions concerning what approaches to decision making can and should be used without falling back on the pre-modern forms of governance where the decisions were made by the political elite.

The argument of this article is that Dewey has a ‘method’ that is relatively simple and transparent. His approach permits valuation to happen without enforcing consensus and in a way that confronts and channels the disagreements between constitutive differences – without leaving them to solidify into passive antagonisms (as Berlin is sometimes alleged to) but letting them be expressed through agonistic contestation (Mauffe 2000). It is in a genuine sense that Dewey encourages a plurality of value orientations to be acted out and recognises that ‘value is a quality that has to be performed’ (Antal, Hutter, Stark 2015:2). This makes his inquiry a good model for robust forms of deliberative democracy (Young 1996, Barker et al. 2012). Deliberation in this sense provides a viable alternative to calculation.

Perhaps one of the ‘good’ things to come out of the pandemic is that – with the qualitative choices between different value orientations and judgements so starkly visible in the public discourse – the need to look for alternatives to the compromised model of calculation has become apparent. This moment renders Dewey’s thinking contemporaneous and vested with urgency.

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