Pragmatism in national and transnational contexts

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Abstract

Recent works, such as Transatlantic James (Oxford University Press, 2014), have signaled the need for transnational analyses of pragmatism. This panel contributes to such approaches by examining the circulation and uses of pragmatist ideas both in different national contexts and across national divides. The American and European pragmatists discussed in their historical context in this panel used pragmatism as an instrument for uncovering, analysing, and/or addressing urgent social, political, and economic problems. The panel aims both to create opportunities for a comparative discussion of different, even incompatible, pragmatic approaches, and to use the insights afforded by the individual contributions in order to answer current political, philosophical, and historiographical questions.
"'Thought and Action': William James, the Magic Pragmatists, and the Fascist Mystics" Francesca Bordogna University of Notre Dame

Addams's Theorizing in "Personal Reactions During the War Marilyn Fischer University of Dayton

Creative Democracy: Dewey and Mouffe Lee A. McBride III The College of Wooster

"The Common Roots of Abundance and Scarcity in a Globalized Economy" Charlene Haddock Seigfried Purdue University, emerita

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"'Thought and Action': William James, the Magic Pragmatists, and the Fascist Mystics" Francesca Bordogna University of Notre Dame

This paper focuses on two related moments in the history of the reception of William James's pragmatism in twentieth-century Italy: Giovanni Papini's and his friend Giuseppe Prezzolini's elaboration of a type of pragmatism known as "magic pragmatism" in the first decade of the century, and the uses to which a group of fascists – the so-called "fascist mystics" – put loosely Jamesian forms of pragmatism in the 1930s and early 1940s. The paper asks how James's pragmatism contributed to shaping magic pragmatism, and whether, as Benito Mussolini famously claimed, it functioned as a philosophical source for fascism. Because Mussolini and the group of fascists with whom I will be concerned interpreted James's pragmatism through the lens of Papini's and Prezzolini's magic pragmatism, my answer to the first question will be instrumental in answering the second one. Both questions have been amply discussed by philosophers and historians. However, whereas most of the scholars who addressed these questions have focused on philosophical theories, I suggest that, in order to understand the nature of the links tying James's pragmatism to magic and "fascist" varieties of pragmatism, we need to focus also on practices and activities. As I will show, for the magic pragmatists and for a few fascist mystics, who viewed themselves as operating in a pragmatist tradition, pragmatism was not primarily a set of theories, but an instrument for "action." Viewing pragmatism as something to be "enacted," rather than theorized, these historical actors performed the links between theory and practice, thought (especially belief) and action, which, as Charlene H. Seigfried, James Kloppenberg and other scholars have emphasized, lay at the kernel of James's pragmatist account of truth. By doing so they transformed pragmatism into a practical regime of life, which they used in order to make themselves into "new philosophers," "new political leaders," and "new men" ["uomini nuovi"] The first part of the paper unearths Papini's and Prezzolini's pragmatist way of life. Drawing on Mazzini's maxim "pensiero e azione," ["thought and action"] and on an avant-garde political and literary discourse prophesizing the advent of the "uomo nuovo," Papini and Prezzolini provided an for the new man with the modernist figure of the "uomo-Dio," or "man-God." The uomo-Dio was a person who, by the practice of deeply interior action, had learned how to unlock the hidden powers of the mind, and had acquired the ability to make his beliefs come true and his desires come real. Papini set him up as an unattainable regulative ideal for his imagined figures of the new philosopher and the new politician. Both aimed to create new truths and transform the world. By engaging in deeply transformative "interior action", of the kind James, after meeting with Papini described in "The Energies of Men," the new philosopher would succeed in inaugurating the "philosophy of the future," one capable of making thought into action. Similarly, by cultivating the hidden powers of their minds, the new politician would succeed in regenerating himself, gaining command over others, and redirecting the country toward a new, spiritual mission. I suggest that Papini and Prezzolini viewed pragmatism as an example of the philosophy of the future and a means for training a new political élite because they believed that pragmatism, more than any other existing philosophy, had the potential to "inspire human action," as James later put it (1907), and guide the cultivation of the inner life. For them pragmatism was primarily a "psicagogia," a practical guide for the conduct of the soul, and it boiled down to a series of techniques by means of which the philosopher would acquire the twin arts of the making of truth and the making of reality. Papini's and Prezzolini's pragmatist psicagogia, as I will show, consisted primarily of psychological, spiritual, and mystical exercises which Papini and Prezzolini drew from James's Principles of Psychology, "The Will to Believe," and Varieties of Religious Experience. These practices, rather than philosophical conceptions of truth and reality, provided the real link between magic pragmatism and James's work. Not surprisingly, although James initially supported Papini's "Man-God program" and praised Papini for "unstiffening pragmatism," after the publication of his Pragmatism he distanced himself from the Italian magic pragmatists, probably fearing that real or imagined analogies between his own pragmatism and Papini's endangered the acceptance of the former. The second part of the talk examines a small group of followers of Mussolini's, chiefly members of a "Scuola di Mistica Fascista" established in Milan in the early 1930s with the purpose of training a fascist super-elite. It shows that they made Papini's vision of the new politician and of the "uomo nuovo" their own, and argues that they resorted to pragmatism as an

instrument to "unstiffen" fascist "beliefs," – or "principles"– and convert them into forms of action, including military action, aimed to make those beliefs true and create a new fascist society. Like the magic pragmatists, when these fascists resorted to pragmatism, they made it into a practical guide for the cultivation of the mind, and into an instrument they used to educate their fellow citizens and make themselves into "uomini nuovi." In conclusion, I argue that in early twentieth-century and in fascist Italy, James's pragmatism traveled and was propagated, not only in the form of theories, but also, and primarily, through practices and forms of action punctuating new "strenuous" ways of life. Many of those practices were inspired by some of James's theories, including his pragmatist account of truth as something that could "be made," his psychological theories of the will, of belief, and of the emotions, as well as by his conception of the strenuous life. Yet, they acquired autonomy from those intellectual sources, and, in doing so, brought about varieties of pragmatism which both distorted James's pragmatist theories and provided unexpected ways of refining and using them.

Addams's Theorizing in "Personal Reactions During the War Marilyn Fischer University of Dayton

"Personal Reactions During the War," a chapter in Jane Addams's Peace and Bread in Time of War, is generally read as an autobiographical account of the psychic costs Addams suffered for remaining a pacifist throughout World War One. This is understandable, as Addams writes of how negative press reports gave her a "bald sense of social opprobrium," resulting in "self-pity, perhaps the lowest pit into which human nature can sink." She went through "dark periods of faint-heartedness" and experienced the "demons" of her enforced solitude, as she fell into "spiritual alienation" from her former colleagues. In her concluding statement, she declares "the categorical belief that a man's primary allegiance is to his vision of the truth and that he is under obligation to affirm it" (P&B 86). This has been read as Addams abandoning pragmatism and withdrawing into idealism. The chapter is in fact a sophisticated pragmatist exploration of what stance to take during wartime, one that challenges fellow pragmatists such as John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, who supported U.S. participation in the war. Addams's analysis draws on international and multi-disciplinary sources, including French literary figures Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse; Swiss philosopher and poet Henri Frédéric Amiel; German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and scientist Georg Frederick Nicolai; British writers John Stuart Mill, Lowes Dickinson, John Hobson, Henry Brailsford, John Hobden, and Joseph Conrad; and American scientists David Starr Jordan and George Nasmyth. Theorists during World War One, both those supporting war and those objecting to war, called on social evolutionary theorizing to support their claims. Addams followed this practice. She places her statements of self-doubt, isolation, and alienation in the context of then current theories of collective psychology, particularly those of British neurosurgeon and social psychologist Wilfred Trotter, British psychologist William McDougall, and German physiologist Georg Frederick Nicolai. These authors use humans' gregarious, social, and sympathetic instincts to underscore the centrality of associated life for human well-being and the psychic costs of isolation. Here, Addams's autobiographical statements show her willingness to place herself inside the theories on which she draws, rather than posing as an objective, rational outsider observer. She also draws on John Stuart Mill's discussions of how much we are subtly affected by others' feelings, thinking, and sympathy. The proper response to a sense of isolation is not a Nietzschean spirit of defiance, nor an assertion of individualistic autonomy, but careful scrutiny and empirical backing for one's position. Addams cites many scientific theories as bases for her continuing opposition to the war. Using German physiologist Georg Frederick Nicolai's The Biology of War, and American scientist George Nasymth's Social Progress and Darwinian Theory, she counters the then-popular position that war could serve to further society's evolution as a misinterpretation of Darwin. She reinforces these with British economic and political theorists Henry Brailsford, John Hobson, and Lowes Dickinson. Addams's conclusion that "a man's primary allegiance is to his vision of the truth and that he is under obligation to affirm it," should be set next to Mill's statement that "it is [a thinker's] first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead." In calling this a "categorical belief" Addams highlights how in war, an intellectual is placed in an extreme and anomalous situation. She had previously used John Morley's On Compromise, a highly regarded text among Victorian political

thinkers, to justify compromises she had made. Morley argues that compromises are morally acceptable if one advocates for the "best possible" result that also keeps open opportunities for further discussion and reassessment. War is the one circumstance in which these opportunities are closed. Pragmatists, committed to testing the validity of their stances in practice, find that war also makes such testing impossible. All that is left is to claim allegiance to those positions found most convincing through historical and scientific examination. Addams challenges Dewey, Mead and other war supporters to identify those experiences upon which "this pathetic belief in the regenerative results of war could be founded." Addams's reasoning about pacifism in wartime is valuable as model of how to work creatively with materials from multidisciplinary and international sources. While the specific theories Addams calls on are now outdated, she creatively brings them to bear on what was the most pressing issue of her day, an issue that was at once deeply personal and of international reach: What stance is one to take, as a morally, socially, and intellectually responsible being, toward war? The pattern Addams creates is valuable to us as we seek contemporary resources for addressing contemporary problems.

Creative Democracy: Dewey and Mouffe Lee A. McBride III The College of Wooster

In *Individualism, Old and New* (1930), John Dewey offers a critical analysis of what he terms "the religion of prosperity" in the United States (6). He claims that our materialism, our devotion to money making, our interest in private profit is "the serious and fundamental defect of our civilization" (15). In various texts, Dewey argues that social inquiry and creative intelligence must be harnessed and wielded on the technological and economic forefronts. He argues that we should reassess our human goals/ends in light of our ostensive (liberal democratic) commitments to liberty, egalitarianism, and fraternity, working to direct technological and economic developments toward social, rather than merely private, goods. In "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us" (1939), Dewey argues that the creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute is the continuous task of democracy (230).

While I agree with Dewey, I have often wondered about the rational and cooperative manner in which economic, political, and social inequities were supposed to be addressed in Dewey's model. Enlightened enculturation, education, and cooperative inquiry into indeterminate situations are held up as the preferred means of social amelioration. This, in essence, relies upon convincing fellow citizens, in face-to-face dialectical exchange, that some proposed change to the social order is best for themselves and the community or polity at large. As some have pointed out, this may be a bit too idealistic (Talisse). It may rely upon fairly homogenous populations that are open to the questioning and revision of their closely-held values. If consumerism and the accumulating of capital presently commands religious devotion, it may be exceedingly difficult to draw people into civil dialogue, let alone cooperative inquiry, regarding one's critical perspective of capitalist ideology. And, even if people engage in discourse, there is no guarantee that a consensus or resolution will be established.

To highlight this apparent limitation in Dewey's work, I juxtapose Chantal Mouffe's recent articulation of agonism and radical democracy in *Agonistics* (2013). Like Dewey, Mouffe is critical of neo-liberalism and its blunt advocacy of materialism, consumerism, and profit making. She shares a concern for the exploited worker and the underclass, who struggle under this ideology. Mouffe calls for an engaged radical democratic politics, yet she argues that "there will always be a struggle between conflicting hegemonic projects aiming at presenting their views of the common good" (79). The articulation and re-articulation of the common world is exceedingly political and it does not take place in a neutral terrain in which observers could impartially decide if things have been composed in a 'good' or 'bad' way (81). Thus, Mouffe argues that a vibrant democracy relies upon on-going agonistic struggle (7).

Dewey and Mouffe seem to share certain commitments; notably, that social orders and norms are contextual and contingent, that democracy is the preferable mode of political engagement, and that the consumerism and profit motive of modern capitalism must be

critiqued and attenuated. Moreover, much of Mouffe's work takes the European Union (EU) as its context and object of study. This provides an imagination-expanding counterpoint to the typical ethnocentric, United States-focused political thought. I believe that a constructive amalgam of these two positions can be articulated. In the end, I argue that Mouffe's suggestions regarding agonism, aesthetic strategies, and radical politics may be a welcomed addendum to Dewey's earlier call for creative democracy.

"The Common Roots of Abundance and Scarcity in a Globalized Economy"
Charlene Haddock Seigfried Purdue University, emerita

Under the rather bland title of "The Philosophy of a New Day," Jane Addams addressed technological, social, and economic issues of great concern to her contemporaries. Written late in life, her short speech to the 1933 International Congress of Women exemplifies the centrality of morally guided social reconstruction to pragmatic theorizing. Addams was responding to what was expected to be an era of abundance in which enough resources to satisfy the needs of the whole planet would be produced by fewer people. In contrast, we are struggling to respond to present disasters and projected scarcity induced by global warming, itself a result of the technological revolution that seemed so promising at its inception. I argue that–oddly enough–Addams's analysis has relevance to both transitional crises.

The setting provides an important context. The fact that Addams begins by questioning whether a new day will actually happen is a direct challenge to the motivations behind the World's Fair of 1933-34. It took place during Chicago's centennial year while the Great Depression was going on. "In a significant break with the Columbian Exposition and all earlier fairs," according to Cheryl R. Ganz, "the 1933 exposition reflected the business-military-engineering model fundamental to the professional careers of its primary organizers, Rufus and Charles Dawes and Lenox R. Lohr. . . . Exhibits also emphasized science and technology's application to everyday life, leading viewers to imagine a better future" (2). While the fair was set up to celebrate the second industrial revolution, Addams's approach is more cautious and critical.

She begins, not with one, but two industrial revolutions that took place in her lifetime. Both caused severe social upheavals. The first one involved the waves of immigrants torn from their rural environments and forced to make a new life in a foreign, urban, and often hostile environment. The second caused the increasing obsolescence of workers due to technological advancement, specifically that more assembly line workers were being displaced through the latest inventions of automation.

Addams sees her role as a philosopher to be one of drawing attention to unjust social, economic, and political conditions, explaining why they are unjust despite the fact that they often appear to be the normal and acceptable way of organizing society. This includes motivating people to create a more just and equitable society as the best expression of their efforts to lead a good and fulfilling life. This is in direct opposition to the intent of the fair organizers, who, "influenced by the war and early twentieth-century distrust of humankind's capacity to produce a better world, replaced orthodox views with their belief that progress rides on the swell of technological innovation. . . . In the fair's robot-dominated Fountain of Science they boldly expressed their philosophy that science and technology, independent of human agency, drive progress, a philosophy succinctly articulated in the fair's theme, 'Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms"' (Ganz, 3).

Having gone through two industrial revolutions in her lifetime, Addams feels called upon to analyze the latest difficult period of transition and perplexity. She points out three aspects of the situation to address: (1) Inequality in the rate of progress for different people and countries; (2) The obsolescence of certain social concepts because they are no longer useful but that are nonetheless being clung to because of fear of new concepts not yet in place, and (3) The widespread spirit of conformity leading to intellectual apathy and mental incapacity.

(1) We are diversified, not only in the goals we, as a society, should seek, but even when we sometimes agree, it takes place at different speeds. Think of access to high quality education, economic resources, safe neighborhoods, and freedom from harassment.

(2) The obsolescence of certain social concepts, such as nationalism. Although born of liberty and free development, it now threatens them. Our economics and politics are in conflict everywhere. Economics is making nations more interdependent, but it is being thwarted by more intense nationalism. Where international trade is promising wider distribution of goods, it is being strangled by national restrictions.

(3) Widespread impatience with differences of opinion results in conformity, on the one hand, and fear of radicalism on the other. When just having differing opinions is seen as radical, the conditions for intolerance and persecution are present. Stifling the proliferation of different points of view that are so necessary in a free society for generating new approaches to social problems becomes especially dangerous in periods of worldwide maladjustment. Failure to think for oneself opens the way to the demagoguery of those who claim to have solutions.

In a direct riposte to the fair organizers' belief that at most, humankind could contribute to world progress through consumerism, Addams says that a better analysis of current conditions, undistorted by self-serving and inherited traditions, is needed. Addams asks how, in the light of acknowledged disparities, we should respond. Challenging the philosophy behind the world's fair, she appeals instead to "our philosophy." She intimates it is a philosophy that is or should be shared by her audience. Addams says that certain things are obvious, such as that women's organizations will fulfill their high ambitions only insofar as they keep "their philosophy more or less pragmatic." They will be useful only to the extent that they learn from unfolding events what lessons are worthwhile to pass on. Back of this injunction is the pragmatic method of experiential and experimental learning.

Keywords: Jane Addams, agonism, democracy, Dewey, 'fascist mystics', human agency, International Congress of Women, William James, Chantal Mouffe, Papini, pacifism in wartime, Prezzolini, science and pacifism, social evolution, 'uomini nuovi'