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# Jane Addams: Pragmatism as Social Practice and Social Ethics

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## Abstract

G. H. Mead stated in 1896 that there are three general types of human activity: work, play, and art. This statement is the result of a fruitful combination between decades of research focused on human behavior and the years of practical experience in social work with the settlements of Chicago. For Mead, as for John Dewey and Jane Addams, the interdependence between theoretical research and social praxis was a necessary condition for the construction of a democratic society. Play, work, and art are the cornerstones of the kind of social experience the Chicago pragmatists had in mind.

Since John Dewey and G.H. Mead have been more present in the Pragmatist scholarship, the paper focuses specifically on Jane Addams. Despite of being considered an American Heroine (as the biography by Allen F. Davis names her) and having been awarded a Peace Nobel Prize in 1931, her contribution to social issues is practically unknown in the European context. Jane Addams can be seen not only as the executive force of the pragmatist utopian view of society but also as the pioneer of a feminist revolutionary utopia. Her model of social revolution shows a very interesting connection between a theory of social epistemology (in a descriptive level) and the aims of a social ethics (in a normative level). Therefore, the social philosophy of Jane Addams offers very interesting conceptual keys to reassess the possibilities of the Pragmatist philosophy in the new century.

The paper aims at presenting and discussing three key aspects of Addam's contribution to a pragmatist social philosophy and putting social practice in dialogue with the insights of Addam's fellow pragmatists.

(1) Philosophy and education: Addams and Dewey on progressive education. One of the goals of the Hull House grounded by Addams was to offer education to the immigrant population of the Chicago settlements. I would like to show how the kind of social work pursued in the Hull House converges with Dewey's principles of education exposed in his *Pedagogic Creed*. This pedagogic view requires not only attending to every child's specific needs but also the implication of the whole community in the children's education. The originality of Addam's perspective is her focus on play and the arts, since one of the most fundamental concerns of the Hull House was to take the children from the factories and bring them back to the playgrounds and to the schools. For Addams, the arts had an essential function in developing political imagination and this precondition for democracy must be promoted already in early childhood education.

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(2) Philosophy and social experience: Addams on interpretative memory. What we all pragmatists have in common is the reassessment of the philosophical term "experience". The pragmatist use of the term "experience" is intended to include all kinds of experience (natural, moral, artistic, religious and mystic) in a non-reductionistic way. Experience is not absolute or something that happens all-at-once. Therefore, the most important epistemological task is that of *reconstruction*. On a second level, social experience is the basis of the democratic *ethos*, which the pragmatism has as its goal. Addams made a very impressive work by collecting experiences of disadvantaged collectives, especially immigrant women in Chicago and young people in the war front. It would be interesting to see how Addams' approach to interpretative memory and elaboration of trauma can be placed within a general pragmatist theory of social experience.

(3) Philosophy, peace and bread in times of war. Addams was a convinced pacifist and she was very active denouncing crime wars during the First World War and grounding a Women League for Peace at The Hague. At this time, pacifism was considered antipatriotic and she suffered the public harassment of the militarists. It would be interesting to compare Addams' argumentation lines against war and James' moral equivalent of war to see how pragmatism provides different sets of reasons for being a pacifist.

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