
PRAGMATISM & FEMINISM

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Abstract

Since the 1990s there have been parallel developments in the fields of feminist critical theory and pragmatist philosophy. Researchers in the field of pragmatism have engaged in the mobilization of minority voices (Charlene Haddock Seigfried 1996, Richard Rorty, 1991) whilst feminists have engaged in the exploration and mobilization of women's voices (Elizabeth Grosz 1994; Nancy Fraser 1994; Iris Marion Young 1990; Carol Gilligan 1982).

There is a close correlation between the feminist critique of the normalization of individuals and the pragmatist critique of the same phenomenon: hence their common defence of individual difference. Moreover both feminism and pragmatism have sought to undermine the 'evidence' of the public-private distinction, generally considered one of the founding bases of democratic regimes and the liberal system. For instance within the field of pragmatism there is recent work by Catharine A. MacKinnon, Shannon Sullivan, Marilyn Frye, James Livingston, Heather E. Keith, John Kaag and Mauritius Hamington.

These similarities, which seem quite obvious, are not however clear of ambiguity and problems. There is a growing tension between feminism and pragmatism, due perhaps to a latent sexism in pragmatist philosophers, as Charlene Seigfried argues with regard to John Dewey and William James. From this standpoint pragmatism would risk falling into the trap of essentialism by considering emotion to be natural to women, though the debate about the ethics of care may suggest these questions need reexamination and cannot be dismissed.

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