



## Pragmatism in Jane Addams (1860–1935)

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Jane Addams adopted and advanced the definition of pragmatism developed by her contemporaries in the United States, historically and variously identified as John Dewey, William James, and Charles Sanders Peirce. More inclusive historical renderings of American pragmatist origins include Native Americans, African Americans such as W.E.B. DuBois, and women such as Addams. American pragmatism describes a form of philosophy characterized by commitments to experience, social amelioration, fallibility, growth, and pluralism. The men traditionally credited with founding American pragmatism were university professors who wrote in the style of academia. Addams authored a dozen books and hundreds of articles that move back and forth between her experiences as the leader of the social settlement, Hull House in Chicago as well as her international peace activism and theorizing the wider implications of these experiences. For example, in her first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams opening chapter addresses her experience with charity workers among the immigrant communities in the Hull House neighborhood. She finds that charity workers with fixed ideals who are not responsive and willing to learn from those they endeavor to help, are doomed to failure. Here, Addams addresses a number of pragmatist themes in regard to experience, fallibility, and social amelioration.

Addams contributes feminist sensibilities to pragmatism. In particular, her egalitarian approach translates into a greater concern for race, class, and gender than the classic American philosophers. Addams approach to pragmatism has been variously identified as radical or critical. The line of demarcation between Addams' pragmatism and her contemporaries was perhaps most pronounced in contrasting dispositions toward U.S. entry into World War I. Although her contemporaries support the war effort, Addams vehemently opposed it using arguments based on the social impact of such bellicosity. Addams is considered the pivotal figure in what today's philosophers describe as "feminist pragmatism."

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## **Keywords:**

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