



Social Progress in Jane Addams (1860-1935)

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Jane Addams was a significant intellectual and public figure in the American Progressive Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like her colleagues of the era, she believed that society could make positive progress through intentional effort. Living in the post-Civil War era, Addams often cited the abolishment of slavery in the United States as evidence that society could progress in profound ways. Addams' understanding of social progress was inclusive, democratic, and fueled by education.

Addams's first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), placed social progress at the center of her social philosophy: "each generation must have its own test" of morality that supersedes the previous generation. For Addams, who lived amidst the cosmopolitanism of a massive influx of immigrants to Chicago, social progress must include all members of society, including the marginalized. Addams's referred to her inclusive progress as "lateral" progress: not the progress of the privileged few but advancement made by the whole of society. She describes such progress as "slower perpendicularly, but incomparably greater because lateral."

Addams held a robust understanding of democracy to include active engagement in social amelioration through political processes and community organizing. She believed democracy was a moral way of living together whereby meaningful associations would lead to a better life for all.

For Addams, a broadly defined education was the bedrock of social progress. She includes a chapter on education in *Democracy and Social Ethics* where she repeatedly connects social progress, democracy, and education: "The educators should certainly conserve the learning and training necessary for the successful individual and family life, but should add to that a preparation for the enlarged social efforts which our increasing democracy requires." Addams her work in service of social progress as educative.

Ultimately, social progress was a democratic and ethical imperative for Addams.

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