

BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE.
JANE ADDAMS AND HER DESTINY

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In the present study I intend to continue a process, initiated by feminist scholars, of recovering the contributions made by Jane Addams, one of the most famous women in American History, to pragmatism and political thinking and practice as well. She is best known for her struggles for women's right, child health and safety, and immigrant rights, but less known for her unyielding pacifism during the First World War. She pioneered positions on war and democracy later adopted by major figures in American philosophy, and her work radically challenged dominant assumptions about the proper relationship between war and politics.

Born in 1860, she was contemporary of the early Chicago men. She was raised in a small Midwestern town, and profoundly influenced by her father, a Quaker, state senator, and mill owner. When her father died, in 1881, she felt confused and despairing. Ill and surrounded by family problems, she traveled to Europe, hoping to find an answer to her struggle in searching for a place in the world, which she finally found on a second travel in Europe. Accompanied by her college friend, Ellen Gates Starr, she visited Toynbee Hall in London's East End, and she became impressed with their work for the poor. Emphasizing urban disorganization as a barrier to needed education and culture, Toynbee Hall provided a model for Addams' resolution of her personal and occupational crises. This resolution occurred through social settlements where she could remain a "lady" while making a social and political impact. And she quickly succeeded in assuming leadership of the American social settlement and subsequently altered the course of American thought and politics.

In January 1889, when she returned to United States, Addams and her friend Starr, moved to Chicago and rented an apartment, which soon became known as Hull House, the center of a major movement and a place where social assistance was born in America. In 1892 the University of Chicago opened its doors bringing many faculty members, as visitors and lecturers to Hull House. The 1890's were controversial years at Hull House because anarchists, Marxists, socialists, unionists, and leading social theorists, congregated there. John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, among others, were frequent visitors, lecturers and close friends of Addams, so we can say that Chicago pragmatism was born through their collegial contacts and intellectual changes. They wanted to combine scientific and objective

observation with ethical and moral values to generate a just and liberated society. Hull House and Addams gained a national and international reputation as a radical, innovative and successful institution.

Jane Addams was author of eleven books and hundreds of articles and she continued her teaching and educating efforts through lectures across the country and at Hull House. She led social reforms organizations, campaigned for the Progressive Party and helped to found numerous government agencies – notably the Children's, Women's and Immigration Bureaus.

Adams's pacifism could be best framed in terms outlined by a well-known American feminist scholar, Mary Jo Deegan: first, as a "critical pragmatist", meaning a politically engaged version of the pragmatist philosophy then emerging from the Chicago School, which argued that "democracy and education needed to be used as tools to improve social institutions, community control, and the vitality of every day life", we find that her work radically challenged the prevalent idea that war was necessary tool of politics;¹ and second, as a "cultural feminist" which is an aspect of her work that, perhaps more than any other, raises the question of gender essentialism: the fact that she targets her pacifist rhetoric primarily at women. She does not call on women to oppose war for essentialist reasons but for the very pragmatic and feminist reason that a woman in general operate from an experiential base than do the male politicians and military officers who foolishly call for war. Such an interpreting of her work not only furthers the recovery of her innovative weaving of pragmatism and feminism, but also makes her pacifism more applicable to modern conditions by freeing it from the charge of gender essentialism.

Once we view Addams's pacifism as an example of cultural feminism and critical pragmatism we can begin to see her as one of the few thinkers who saw how the idea of an absolute war would become a totally nightmare for humanity once technology was able to grant it. Thus, her work prophetically prefigured our current situation, where warfare is a practice that, if allowed to progress to the extremes, would end politics through the annihilation of human society.

In the period before World War I honors were heaped upon her: she became the first woman to be elected president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, the first woman awarded an honorary degree by Yale University the same year. She even had a chrysanthemum named after her. She helped spread her own reputation through her speaking and writing. Everything she wrote, every speech she gave contained an optimistic message.

¹ Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918*, New Brunswick (USA) and Oxford (UK), Transaction Books, 1988, p. 273.

“Under all the suffering and sordidness she sees the great, basic element of human kindness” one observer reported.² Her writing, even more than her speaking, led to her reputation as the most famous woman in America. Between 1907 and 1916 she published six books and more than 150 essays and reports.³ Many of her articles appeared in the new mass-circulation magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal* (which named her in 1908 the “First American Woman”) or *The American Magazine*, which attracted more advertising, used slick paper and more illustrations, sold for ten cents rather than twenty-five and often had circulation of five hundred thousand to a million copies an issue than old standards magazines. During the period just before World War I, these magazines were the only communication medium of national scope. They allowed Jane Addams to reach a much wider audience than was possible for other women in the generation before. Reporters discovered that Jane Addams was good copy so they summarized everything she wrote, and reported everything she did. She became an opinion leader, who not only made news, but influenced attitudes on a wide variety of subjects. She was constantly winning popularity contests. A poll in Chicago in 1906 asked “Who is the best woman in Chicago?” and Jane Addams ran first in the poll. Also in 1913 *The Independent*, a popular magazine, asked its readers to list the ten “most useful Americans”. “In other words, who among our contemporaries are the most value to the community [...]?” Jane Addams finished second to Thomas Edison and ahead of Andrew Carnegie.⁴

In 1912 the New York State Woman Suffrage Association took a poll of its members to determine the twenty-five “greatest women in the history”. Susan B. Anthony, Madame Curie, and Jane Addams led the list, but of those still alive, “Jane Addams was far in the lead”.⁵ In the same year in order to publicize the cause of woman suffrage she performed a “witty monologue” on the stage of the Majestic in New York, and she acted in a movie with Anna Howard Shaw. It was a suffrage melodrama whose message was that votes for women would eliminate sweatshops.

Probably no other woman in any period of American history has been venerated and worshiped the way Jane Addams was in the period just before World War I. It is true that there were other women like Mary McDowell, Lillian Wald, Clara Barton, Helen Keller, Mary Baker Eddy, but the two

² Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine. The Life and Legend of Jane Addams*, London, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

³ See John C. Farrell, *Beloved Lady: A history of Jane Addams's Ideas on Reform and Peace*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967.

⁴ See “The Most Useful Americans”, in *Independent*, Chicago, LXXIV (May 1913), p. 956-963.

⁵ Davis, *American Heroine*”, p. 200.

women who came closest to matching the role played by Jane Addams were Frances Willard in the generation before her, and Eleanor Roosevelt in the generation after.

Because she was the most famous woman and the most important worker in America, when the war broke out in Europe in 1914, Jane Addams was swept into a position of leadership in the peace movement. Just as she appreciated the symbolic importance of taking up the cause of Progressives in 1912, she could not hold back in 1914 when most of those who had fought for women suffrage and social justice revolted against a war that seemed to negate all they stood for.

Addams was against war for three reasons, which are interrelated: First, Addams's pragmatism is clearly at work in her critique of war as an outdated and pernicious response to problematic situation between nations. Addams's book *Newer Ideals of Peace* "analyzed war as a limiting experience that was inappropriate to modern life".⁶ She mentions in her book *Peace and Bread in Time of War* that after examining some of the economic causes of the First World War, she and her colleagues in the Woman's Peace Party were struck by the foolishness of relying on war to adjudicate international political problems: "We asked why the problem of building a railroad to Bagdad, of securing corridors to the sea for a land-locked nation, or warm water harbors for Russia should result in war [...] Was it not obvious that such situations transcend national boundaries and must be approached in a spirit of world adjustment, that they could not be peacefully adjusted while men's minds were still held apart by national suspicions and rivalries".⁷ This first critique of war is probably the most pragmatic because it rejects any absolute standard by which to judge any kind of war in favor of looking at the effect that war and related concepts (such as nationalism in this case) have on human experiences. Addams frames war not as a piece of transhistorical baggage that humanity must lug through each age, but as simply a foolish way to resolve problems of human need.

The second critique that she reveals has to do with the fact that war not only is an ineffective solution to international problems but it also erases past human achievements. In the chapter from her work *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*, titled "Challenging War", we see very clear the idea that war, far from being a social tonic, actually effects a decay of human society. Here Addams paraphrases the mother of a young soldier reading from her son's letter from the front that revealed the waste of World War I: "He wrote that whenever he

⁶ Linda Scott, "Jane Addams and William James on Alternatives to War", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Philadelphia, Volume 54 (1993), No.2, p. 241-254.

⁷ Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War*, Boston, Hall, 1922, p. 52.

heard the firing of a huge field-piece he knew that the explosion consumed years of the taxes which had been slowly accumulated by some hard-working farmer or shopkeeper [...] he then added that this war was tearing down the conception of government which had been so carefully developed during the generation in the minds of the very men who had worked hardest to fulfill that conception.”⁸

Addams saw that the same problems that precipitated the war would persist after it ended and all the governments would be even less able to address them.

She argued, in the third time, that war is fundamentally incompatible with the ideals of democracy and justice. Here we see again the critical pragmatism in Addams’s evaluation of war through the democratic values at the core of pragmatist philosophy. And she placed this aspect of her opposition to war in a specifically American context when she says: “We [the members of the Woman’s Peace Party] consider that the United States was committed not only to using its vast neutral power to extend democracy throughout the world, but also to the conviction that democratic ends could not be attained through the technique of war.”⁹ She opposed war because it was for her an artifact that was anathema to human needs and democracy.

Jane Addams pursued her pacifism by means of a call for the end of war directed primarily to women by specifically calling on: “women to defend those at the bottom of society who, irrespective of the victory and defeat of any army, are ever oppressed and overburdened. The suffering mothers of the disinherited feel the stirring of the old impulse to protect and cherish their unfortunate children, and women’s haunting memories instinctively challenge war as the implacable enemy of their age-long undertaking.”¹⁰ This passage raises two questions. First, why does Addams direct her pacifist argument at women, when men alone conducted warfare in her time and women were still denied the right to vote in the United States? And second, does Addams suggest women serve as the vanguard of pacifist movements because they are inherently predisposed for peace, or for some other reason?

For whatever reason, Addams clearly thinks that women have a particular responsibility to oppose war. While Addam’s language might contain vestiges of older ideas of gender that assumed women were essentially drawn to peace and men to war, a closer reading shows that Addams’s general arguments for peace and her specific calls to women to fight for peace emerged from a social philosophy that weaved aspects of critical pragmatism

⁸ Eadem, *The Long Road of Women’s Memory*, New York, Macmillan, 1916, p. 119-120.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

with cultural feminism. Addams chose women as her audience because she recognized that women were habitually and experientially familiar with the devastation of war in ways that men were not. She showed her pragmatist's colors in her call to women because it revealed the extent to which she linked her hope for the improvement of human life to the possibility of modifying outdated habits through the use of experience. For Addams, women are not innately more compassionate, but more practiced at experiencing human need and less familiar with the opiates of masculine honor, nationalism, and antagonism that dull men to the waste of war.

Women, especially in Addams's day, had wider familiarity with the trials involved in rearing children than men did. Because of their involvement in life-affirming practices, and gender roles enabled them to speak out against war. When we examine Addams's position on women and war, we see that it is not essentialist, but critically pragmatic. Women needed to speak out against war because they saw that reliance on war as a response to international problems would lead to disaster, and because they could speak for the men who knew war was insanity but were rendered silent by their habits and experience.

Addams's persuasive work entitled *If Men were seeking the Franchise*, illustrates her rejection of essentialist doctrines. This paper, first published in 1913, takes up the hypothetical question: "What if women had run society from the beginning, and men were now asking women for vote?" The Addams uses this hypothetical reversal of gender roles to critique patriarchal arguments against women suffrage. She goes on to list (in reversed form) the popular male objections to the women's vote, such as "men would find politics corrupting [...] they would vote as their wives and mothers did [...] men's suffrage would diminish respect for women [...] and so on."¹¹ She goes on to say that the hypothetical women deciding to offer men the vote would not put forth such ridiculous arguments, and much important, would not consider men as a class by themselves, inferior to women, arguing instead that such essentializing is an error that denies a society the opportunity to make use of its full human potential. Thus she explicitly rejects the idea that women are or should be thought of as a class by themselves.

Writing after her tour of Europe in 1915, she pointed out that women of any warring nation are plagued by an internal struggle regarding war. She says that women there have "found themselves in the struggle, often tragic and bitter, between two conceptions of duty, one of which is antagonistic to the other."¹² On the one hand, women feel the tug of "tribal loyalty" which causes

¹¹ Eadem, "If Men Were Seeking the Franchise", in *Jane Addams: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Emily Cooper Johnson, New York, MacMillan, 1960, p. 112.

¹² Eadem, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*, p. 115.

the individual to immediately want to protect the nation or community's standards.¹³ On the other hand, women also feel the force of "woman's deepest instinct, that the child of her body must be made to live."¹⁴ Women are thus torn between two impulses, one bellicose, the other pacifist. This tension highlights the fact that, according to Addams, women make their judgments about war from a wider set of concerns than do men. On one hand women understand the nationalism and fear that urge men to war, since they are just as much part of the group or nation as the men are. On the other hand, women have another set of experiences that enable them to see the consequences of war with clarity that men lack. Addams thus directs her pacifist arguments at women more than men because she recognizes that women's experiences tend to make them more aware of the full consequences of war.

The struggle within each woman's heart is for Addams a microcosm of the struggle within the heart of each society. We are all forced to choose between the ancient and dynamic practices of preserving life and the more recent practice of preserving the State. Addams hopes that women, whose social position offers them the chance to develop habits that give meaningful shape to the first set of practices, can direct society as a whole to place life over nationality and pride. She explains this twin legacy by pointing to their presence in her family history: "Each individual within himself represented something of both strains: I used to remind myself that although I had ancestors who fought in all American wars since 1684, I was also the daughter, granddaughter and the great granddaughter of millers."¹⁵

In "The Revolt Against War" Addams explicitly rejects the idea that women are essentially predisposed against war. She goes on to thematize the role of experience in determining a person's stance toward war by suggesting the hypothetical example of male artist who was drafted to fight and called on to fire upon a beautiful building: "I am sure he would have a little more compunction than the men who had never given himself to creating beauty and did not know the cost of it. There is certainly that deterrent on the part of the women, who have nurtured these soldiers from the time they were little things, who brought them up to the age of fighting, and now see them destroyed."¹⁶

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

¹⁵ Eadem, *Peace and Bread in Time of War*, p. 76.

¹⁶ Eadem, "The Revolt against War", in Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Alice Hamilton, *Women at the Hague: The International Congress of Women and its Results*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 358.

This passage indicates the importance of habit and experience for Addams's opposition to war. Women are the logical audience for pacifist rhetoric because they are more likely to understand what is at stake because of their traditional involvement with the preservation of life. Her hypothetical example of a male artist indicates that she clearly sees this life-affirming response as something available and possible for all people, regardless of their gender or sex. The issue is the way in which they are thought to respond to problems and relate to their world. The male artist, in the context of twentieth-century society, is better able to understand the difficulty of creation and the total loss that accompanies war. Addams contrasts the fleeting concerns of tribe and state that motivate men to war with the far-reaching concerns for life that motivate women to oppose war when she says: "at the present moment the very names of the tribe and the honors and glories which men sought are forgotten, while the basic fact that the mothers held the lives of their children above all else, instead upon staying where the children had a chance to live, and cultivated the earth for food, laid the foundations for an ordered society".¹⁷

Because of their familiarity with the vicissitudes of life and nurturing, women, according to Addams, have a unique perspective on war itself. While few women were directly involved with combat during her time, Addams argues that they have a keener sense of what is lost and, more important, have a stronger desire to speak out. We see this dynamic at work in the entirety of her piece *The Revolt against War*, where she sacrificed her own popular acclaim in America in order to give voice to the experience of the young men in the trenches.

In no place did Addams more daringly pierce the veil that separated the dominant American consciousness of World War I from its lived realities that when, in July 9, 1915, and again in *The Revolt against War*, she spoke about the use of drugs and alcohol upon the soldiers in the trenches: "We heard in all countries similar statements in regard to the necessity for the use of stimulants before men would engage in bayonet charges-that they have a regular formula in Germany, that they give them rum in England and absinthe in France; that all have to give them the dope before the bayonet charge is possible. Well, now, think of that."¹⁸

She became the target of great hatred because she strips away a pleasant illusion (that of brave boys engaging in valiant combat to emerge as a tempered men) to reveal an ugly reality (that there was no reason to the way that World War I was fought, and that the offensive battles could be executed only by men made insensible by drugs and alcohol). Her rhetoric here is very

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 359.

pragmatic in the sense that the idea of valiant war as a necessary part of human affairs is revealed to be a dangerously outdated ideal when judged by its effects on the human lives in the trenches and in the surrounding countries.

For Addams, women oppose war because their work gives them a strong sense of the loss and reversion involved in war and also because their freedom from male habit into the myths and rituals of war enables them to see it for the madness that it is. *Therefore, Addams's call to women to oppose war is both critically pragmatic (because women function from a wider range of considerations than men do) and culturally feminist (in that she asks women to speak for the men who know the truth but will not speak because women's experiences and habits enable them to see beyond the present propaganda to the future misery and degradation of humanity).*

Addams asks women to follow her example and protest war. For example, she urges women not to be afraid of speaking out against war by saying: "I am certain that if a minority of women in every country would clearly express their convictions they would find that they spoke not for themselves alone, but for those men for whom the war has been a laceration – an abdication of the spirit. Such women would doubtless formulate the scruples of certain soldiers whose mouths are stopped by courage, men who months ago with closed eyes rushed to the defense of their countries".¹⁹ Thus, women need to give voice to the words of outrage that young soldiers will not speak, and serve witness to the horrors they have seen. On this point, she does not merely urge, or ask women to speak out. She charges them with the prophetic responsibility of speaking truth to preserve humanity itself.

Addams called out to other women to oppose war because she viewed women as the inheritors and guardians of the promise of progress and civilization. Women are not born to this stance, but learn it. Through their experience with childrearing and nurturing women see that war is simply too wasteful and did not solve human problems. She forced her nation to redefine surrender and death, so that they learn to fight not against other people, but against the fetters of habits that control our actions long after they outgrow their use.

John Dewey and W. E. B. Du Bois both supported U. S. involvement in World War I. Du Bois encouraged American involvement because he saw the trenches of the Western Front as an arena in which African Americans could prove themselves as true Americans and gain political equality and social justice once the war was over. Dewey found the war an opportunity to practice methods of social organization on a massive scale. It thus promised him and other scientists the opportunity to bring the new methods of science to bear on human endeavors and behaviors. But Jane Addams's perspective – as a

¹⁹ Eadem, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*, p. 128.

community activist, feminist and pragmatist scholar, international organizer, and miller's daughter – made her refute arguments for war that were based largely on naive images of warfare in an age when war had evolved into a form of mechanized carnage. By the time World War II had started Jane Addams had died, but her critical pragmatism lived on in the works of Du Bois and Dewey, both of whom rescinded their previous belief that war could serve some social good and therefore opposed involvement in the second conflagration.