

Maurice Hamington and Celia Bardwell-Jones (Editors)  
Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism

NEW YORK & LONDON: ROUTLEDGE, 2012

*Reviewed by Mathew A. Foust*

978-0-415-89991-8

"Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism is an invaluable resource for feminists and pragmatists alike, though it will also serve as an accessible and interesting introduction for nonspecialists. I expect that we can look forward to a good deal of feminist pragmatist scholarship that will cite as its inspiration ideas encountered in this volume."

Fourteen essays comprise this volume, arranged in three thematic categories ("Community and Identity," "Political Practice," and "Ethics and Inquiry"). Contributors range from well-established to much younger scholars, united by the belief in the power and potential of the intersections between American pragmatism and feminist philosophy. Although "analytic" and "continental" feminist perspectives have had some success finding representation in mainstream philosophical discourse, pragmatist feminism has thus far existed at the margins. Framed as a response to the titular question of Charlene Haddock Seigfried's seminal essay, "Where Are All the Pragmatist Feminists?" (Seigfried 1991), the contributors effectively announce their presence and carve ample space for future pragmatist feminist scholarship. This volume thus makes a significant, original contribution to feminist philosophy that will likely inspire further significant and original work.

The editors outline the contours of feminist-pragmatist methodology by pointing to a number of commitments held in common by feminists and pragmatists. Perhaps most significant, feminists and pragmatists underscore the importance of context and experience. The situated character of human experience, with its intimate linkages of practice, values, and knowledge, constitutes a point of departure for both feminists and pragmatists. Epistemology and metaphysics are value-laden social enterprises, and thus must take seriously the nature and need of community. This means paying close attention to the diversity of women's experiences and drawing on a multitude of disciplines for enrichment of perspective. Feminist pragmatism should be understood first and foremost as an engaged philosophy that examines the contexts of women's (and men's) lives, with the hope of promoting reflection, pluralism, community, and justice.

The thematic categories selected by the editors are by no means mutually exclusive. Essays such as Shannon Sullivan's "Transforming Whiteness with Roycean Loyalty: A Pragmatist Feminist Account" could certainly fall under any of the three section headings. Sullivan's piece is, in part, a contribution to an ongoing conversation in pragmatist scholarship concerning the complexity of the subject of race in Royce's philosophy. She carries this conversation into the applied realm, however, coherently incorporating feminist philosophers Sandra Harding, Adrienne Rich, Naomi Zack, and Mab Segrest into a more general conversation about how to critically engage the harmful habits of one's race while preserving one's own racial identity. Ultimately, Sullivan resists adopting the term *race traitor* for a person who betrays the racist tendencies of one's own race, favoring Royce's notion of *loyal to loyalty*, which involves--in Sullivan's application of the concept--being critical of the habits of one's race toward the end of improving members of one's race. As she puts it, "A white identity committed to racial justice need not be grounded primarily in guilt, shame, or betrayal, but can instead be based on a critical loyalty to white people" (36).

In "The Hostile Gospel and Democratic Faith: Black Feminist Reflections on Rap and John Dewey," V. Denise James conceives of rap music as a form of democratic communication with political import consistent with the notion of democracy as a way of life defended by John Dewey. James holds that rap music is attuned to the plight of the suffering and is expressive of possibilities of redemption. Moreover, rap culture creates spaces where disagreement and contradiction are made public, allowing for the expression of moral outrage at instances of oppression. James acknowledges that much of the lyrical content of rap music is misogynistic and violent, but maintains that rap voices should be appreciated for their tendencies toward "keeping it real" and "reppin' the hood" (representing the rapper's neighborhood). While her approach is novel, readers may find themselves straining to be convinced that rap is rife with resources for feminist democratic discourse. When James instructs, "Leave it to biographers to determine whether or not all of the rappers who rap about poverty and struggle actually ever lived the lives about which they create music" (47), one is left to wonder just how much rich male rappers are "keeping it real" and why James vacillates between championing authenticity and disregarding it. It is also odd that James discusses male rappers exclusively, holding that the voices of women rappers are absent from the mainstream. It would seem that drawing upon artists such as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, or Lauryn Hill--each of whom has enjoyed considerable mainstream success--would be a more intuitive and productive approach to her feminist pragmatist project.

With "Border Communities and Royce: The Problem of Translation and Reinterpreting Empiricism," Celia Bardwell-Jones shows how Royce's theory of interpretation in the process of knowledge acquisition offers a theoretical tool for feminist empiricism and feminist border politics. In addition to Royce, Bardwell-Jones draws substantially on the work of neopragmatist W. V. O. Quine; on the side of feminism, she looks to the works of Ofelia Schutte and Gloria Anzaldúa. In Bardwell-Jones's estimation, "placing Latina feminism within discussions of classical pragmatist thinkers, such as Royce, recognizes the overlapping histories of the Americans in which American philosophy can be read to include thinkers within the borderlands" (69). Thus, scholars coming to this volume from an interest in pragmatism may, upon contact with pieces such as Bardwell-Jones's, have the scope of what they consider "American philosophy" widened.

The same effect may be achieved by considering long-overlooked women philosophers who were active during the time of the classical pragmatist tradition. One example of such a thinker is Mary Parker Follett. Although she is widely recognized in the field of organizational leadership,<sup>[i]</sup> she has been largely neglected by philosophers. In her "Dynamic Borders, Dynamic Identities: A Pragmatist Ontology of 'Groups' for Critical Multicultural Transnational Feminisms," Amrita Banerjee enlists Follett's conception of personal identity as a "between relation" to address feminist questions concerning border relations, such as those navigated by Chandra Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders*. Banerjee recasts the relationship between transnationalism and multiculturalism, articulating a new framework with "great potential to mitigate the dichotomy between the two while retaining the best in both" (87).

In "Solving the Problem of Epistemic Exclusion: A Feminist Pragmatist Approach," Susan Dieleman draws on a more contemporary and traditional pragmatist source, Richard Rorty, to address the problem of what she calls "epistemic exclusion": "how one can challenge the norms and practices of knowing that help to

constitute a community when one is unjustly excluded from invoking those norms or participating in those practices because of who one is, how one speaks, or what one says?" (90). Placing Rorty's ideas in dialogue with those of Miranda Fricker and Iris Marion Young, Dieleman argues that Rorty's discursive theory of social progress can be fruitfully applied to the problem of epistemic exclusion. Rorty himself observed the compatibility of pragmatism and feminism prior to the publication of Seigfried's aforementioned piece, so the connection of Rorty to feminism is well deserving of attention (Rorty 1990).

The second section of the volume opens with "Feminist-Pragmatist Democratic Practice and Contemporary Sustainability Movements," in which Judy D. Whipps engages the commitment to democracy in the feminist pragmatist thought of Follett, Jane Addams, and Emily Green Balch, relating their thought to the Earth Charter and the work of Vandana Shiva. From the perspective of the vast majority of scholars of philosophy, Balch will be an unfamiliar name. When Whipps writes, "Shiva's work could be considered feminist-pragmatist philosophy in some senses, but doesn't fully articulate a pragmatist sense of the continual adjustment of ideas based on experiences that we find in Addams's or even Follett's work" (124), one wonders whether the same charge might be made of Balch. However, further research on Balch leads me to think that Whipps is right to group her with Follett and Addams. Indeed, it seems that Whipps has only skimmed the surface of what might come of considering these thinkers together.

In "Community Gardeners or Radical Homemakers?," Lisa Heldke answers in favor of the former, and against the latter. Holding that the "radical homemaking" of Shannon Hayes is "an example of how *not* to advance feminist cosmopolitan patriotism" (129), Heldke advocates community gardening such as that of the Intercultural Gardens project in Germany. With its view that women *first* fix their homes and then go on to tackle the larger society, radical homemaking remains entrenched in the private/public dichotomy. Alternatively, "The garden is an infinitely malleable medium the residents of a cosmopolitan city can use to develop their imagination, cultivate their capacity to appreciate cultural and ethnic variety, and, not insignificantly, share with their neighbors the literal fruits of their creative labors. Gardens are the soil in which cosmopolitan patriotism can be cultivated" (136). Heldke's piece is useful for feminist theorists wrestling with the notion and role of "women's work" in contemporary society.

Continuing work begun in her *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, in "Education's Role in Democracy: The Power of Pluralism," Barbara Thayer-Bacon espouses exploring the role of education in helping us understand how connected we all are to one another, a key move in bringing about a world that may be called democratic. Although it has been implied by one critic that she too quickly caricatures liberalism (Kaaq 2012), I credit Thayer-Bacon nonetheless for the positive proposal she puts forth; her emphases on shared responsibility, shared authority, and shared identity--themes that emerged from her visits to schools in Mexico--are instructive for the project of shaping a pluralistic democratic vision of education. Indeed, her recollections of concrete episodes of teaching and learning in Mexico go far in support of her claim that "The most important lesson we all need to learn is that we need one another to expand our own limited, fallible understandings of our world" (161).

The third section of the volume opens with Cynthia Willett's "Visionary Pragmatism and an Ethics of Connectivity: An Alternative to the Autonomy Tradition in Analytic Ethics." Willett begins with the unequivocal claim, "In an era of global interdependence, the concept of autonomy may no longer name our core moral need" (167). Indeed, Willett finds autonomy too rationalistic and individualistic a notion to explain the impact of social forces in an increasingly globalizing world. Instead, she sees a rich vision of the social person in contemporary pragmatism, especially in its "African American feminist tradition" (169). Some will be surprised to find Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, and Patricia Hill Collins referred to as pragmatists, and this would not be an unwarranted response.<sup>[ii]</sup> It seems that the clearest case for such categorization can be made for Collins, whose "visionary pragmatism" Willett draws upon to outline a notion of democracy rooted in justice and intense connectedness among persons.

In "The Revolutionary Fact of Compassion: William James, Buddhism, and the Feminist Ethics of Care," Cathryn Bailey explores connections among apparently disparate traditions and finds that Mahayana Buddhism and Jamesian pragmatism can together enrich feminist ethics of care. Part of the affinity between Buddhism and pragmatism is a "shared distrust of absolutism" (186), but Bailey also observes the

"radically humble" nature of Buddhism and pragmatism, each being undergirded by a "deeply tolerant sensibility" (188). From Buddhism and pragmatism, care ethicists may be inspired to shift their focus from supplanting masculinist theories with feminist theories, opting instead for a holistic embrace of the continuum of experience and values.

Seeking to revise our conception of *hospitality*, Maurice Hamington argues in his "Hospitality as Moral Inquiry: Sympathetic Knowledge in the Guest-Host Encounter" that hospitality is a species of care, and that because care requires inquiry, hospitality entails inquiry. Interrogating notions of inquiry offered by Charles Sanders Peirce and Dewey, and employing notions of hospitality drawn from Addams's philosophy, Hamington urges that "opportunities for hospitality, particularly with unfamiliar others, should be welcomed, perhaps for reasons of social enjoyment or generosity, but more importantly *for their function as moments of continuing moral education*" (200–01). Thus, Bailey and Hamington both aim to promote cross-pollination between feminist care ethics and feminist pragmatism, but each takes a quite different approach.

With "A Methodological Interpretation of Feminist Pragmatism," Claudia Gillberg suggests that feminist action researchers pursue ideas of collaborative decision-making, collaborative action, and problem-solving in ways that are consistent with feminist pragmatism. Drawing primarily on the thought of Addams and Dewey, Gillberg holds that "Feminist action research is a methodological way to address issues of sustainable problem-solving in ways that feminist pragmatists would approve, not least because agency and the ethics of how things are done are such important principles for both feminist action researchers and feminist pragmatists alike" (226). Gillberg goes on to argue that given their shared commitment to community and democratic values, feminist pragmatism and feminist action research could "form a sustainable antidote for the bureaucratization of knowledge and the lure of knowledge simplification" (233).

In "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Women, Animals, and Oppression," Erin McKenna demonstrates what might be regarded as an early brand of ecofeminism in the writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In both fictional and nonfictional writings, Gilman parallels the oppressive domestic situations of women and animals, defending the subordinated party, insisting on the need for the situations of each to be changed. As McKenna puts it, "The effects of domestication are shared by women and other animal beings. They have both been selected by men for docility and fecundity. If we want to change the conceptualization and conditions of one, we must work to change the conceptualization and conditions of the other" (250). Addressing the work of recent ecofeminists such as Karen Warren, Carol Adams, and Val Plumwood, McKenna makes a convincing case for the need to incorporate the insights of Gilman into contemporary conversation.

The last essay in the volume is "Natural Caring: A Pragmatist Feminist Approach to Ethics in the More-than-Human World," by Heather E. Keith. Keith extends the scope of the dialogue between feminist pragmatism and ethics to include care for natural environments. Drawing on Addams, Keith appreciates Addams's having "recognized the importance of lived experience in cultivating relationality, noting that creating space in natural areas is essential to fostering human relatedness" (263). Citing recent studies from social psychology, Keith claims that interactions with nature can improve our ability to respond morally to others, in both human and nonhuman contexts. Inspired by feminist pragmatist ideals, we stand to cultivate "the capacity for seeing the world as an organic whole filled with relationships, human and beyond, worthy of consideration and care" (266).

*Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism* is an invaluable resource for feminists and pragmatists alike, though it will also serve as an accessible and interesting introduction for nonspecialists. I expect that we can look forward to a good deal of feminist pragmatist scholarship that will cite as its inspiration ideas encountered in this volume.

[i] Follett was the 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner of the International Leadership Association.

[ii] In fact, Toni Morrison resists being called a *feminist*. See Jaffrey 1998.

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**Mathew A. Foust** is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Lander University. He is the author of *Loyalty to Loyalty: Josiah Royce and the Genuine Moral Life* (Fordham University Press, 2012) and several articles in the area of American pragmatism. He has also published work in feminist philosophy, such as "Tragic Possibility, Tragic Ambiguity: William James and Simone de Beauvoir on Freedom and Morality" (*Existential Analysis*, 2013) and "Perplexities of Filiality: Confucius and Jane Addams on the Private/Public Distinction" (*Asian Philosophy*, 2008). In addition to American pragmatism and feminism, his research interests include ethics and Asian & comparative philosophy.

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