Abstract

Pragmatists can be truly called “Kant’s children” (Murphey, 1968). As Sami Philström (2010) has recently shown, many of the pragmatist topics have been inherited from the transcendental questions posed by Kant: What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope? The first one refers to epistemology and metaphysics and assesses the question of how we construct our experience of natural world. The second one is concerned with ethics, i.e. the way we are judging and acting morally. The third one faces the question of belief and religion where no empirical evidence supports faith. These questions and a fourth one, what is man, as a summary of Kant’s philosophy, have been the main axes “around” which the Pragmatist have been going (instead of “going through”, McGiffert, 1910: Philström, 2010; Henschen, 2013) while debating Kantian ideas. Still some important Kantian questions are not exhaustively discussed without taking into consideration the post critical writings: the question of peace and war, universal history, anthropological antagonism, enlightenment, education, moral progress… They all belong to the “primacy of practice” which is a postulate for both, Kant and pragmatists. For this reason, the paper focuses in the question “what can I hope?”, not in relation to religious faith but from the perspective of possible social amelioration contained in Kant’s latest writings Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View (1784) and Perpetual Peace (1795).

If there is someone within the Pragmatist tradition of thought who had fought for perpetual peace this was, without a doubt, Jane Addams (1860 – 1935). Addams had been the only Pragmatist thinker awarded the Nobel Prize in 1931 and despite being not only a tireless social reformer but also a prolific philosopher, her legacy remains broadly unknown (Deegan, 1990; Fischer, 2010; Fischer, 2013; Hamington, 2009; Hay, 2012; Lake, 2014; Menand, 2001; Miller, 2013; Pinhard, 2009; Seigfried, 1996). Addams's social philosophy is being presented here as a promising Pragmatist reformulation and reappraisal of some Kantian insights. Moreover, we can find in Addams’s writings solutions for some of Kant’s limitations, specifically, the exclusion of women and of most non-European men in his pursuit of universal moral progress.

First, Addams’s fight against warfare and for universal peace (Newer Ideals of Peace, 1906; Woman at The Hague, 1915; Peace and Bread in Time of War, 1922) is to be understood in the light of a growing internationalism among the younger generations. Her work in the social settlements of the industrialised Chicago and her journeys through Europe during First World War helped her to come to this conclusion. Addams opposes critically to the philosophical views of Kant of war as “natural state” and to the preservation of “military virtues” in James's moral equivalent of war.
Second, Addams’s social ethics offers a more adequate approach to current social experience. Addams attempted to elucidate the sources of moral discrepancies among individuals but sought them also as a necessary step for moral growth (Democracy and Social Ethics, 1902). According to Addams’s, many moral dysfunctions are caused by social evils such as monotonous industrial work and lacking opportunities to nurture creative citizenship. She used the powers of play and the arts to cultivate the imagination and as a mean to work out generational conflicts. She also recovered the forgotten histories and memories as tools for reconstructing the life narratives of the cultural minorities, especially migrant women (The Long Road of Woman’s Memory, 1916).

Third, if an authentic “Cosmopolitanism” must be reached in a near future our notion of “social progress” should be revised. Addams warned us not to fall into a kind of “Cosmic patriotism”, which would be the same military ideal with new clothes. Addams’s is here presented as the most radical political philosopher among classical pragmatists. Two important points become Addams’s radical legacy for our present situation: an opening to transcultural ethical ideas (Hay, 2012) through sympathetic knowledge, and the “lateral progress” (Hamington, 2009) as condition of possibility for enlarging the social basis of a post historical but nevertheless enlightened, peaceful world.

References

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Philström, S. (2010). Kant and Pragmatism (retrieved from pragmatismtoday.eu, last access 04/09/2017)