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Marilyn Fischer

University of Dayton, mfischer1@udayton.edu

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Reading Dewey's Political Philosophy Through Addams's Political Compromises

Marilyn Fischer

Abstract. Both John Dewey and Jane Addams believed that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy. While their vision of democracy is rightly called radical, the processes through which they proposed to cure the ills of democracy are in large measure conservative, in the classical, Burkean sense of the term. To show this, I first explain how well their political philosophies line up, particularly their proposals for political reconstruction. I then use Addams's experiences as a delegate to the 1912 Progressive Party Convention as a test case in real time for Dewey's proposals for political reconstruction. The compromises she made there demonstrate the Burkean conservative character of the process of pragmatist change, as well as reveal how the tragic resides within pragmatist efforts at social reconstruction.

For Addams and Dewey, democracy is a way of life, encompassing many forms of associative living through which individuals' potentialities can flourish. Both believed that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy. These two statements rub: while their vision of social democracy is rightly called radical, the processes through which they proposed to cure the ills of democracy are in large measure conservative, in the classical, Burkean sense of the term.¹

¹ Dewey himself called his understanding of democracy radical. See John Dewey, "Democracy is Radical," 1937, reprinted in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 296-299. Westbrook describes Dewey's vision of democracy as radical. See Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), at 188-89. Also see Melvin Rogers, "Introduction: Revisiting The Public and Its

To bring out the Burkean conservative nature of these processes in a focused way, I will work primarily with their political philosophies, with politics understood as a necessary, though limited component of democracy as a way of life.² Addams gives elements of her political philosophy in a number of essays she wrote defending her participation in the 1912 Progressive Party convention, and Dewey gives his fuller account in his 1927 book, *The Public and Its Problems*. Their political philosophies match up well. The tensions and ambiguities Addams faced at the convention demonstrate how the process of curing the ills of democracy with more democracy is fraught with risk and contingency.

In August 1912 Addams participated in the Progressive Party's Chicago Convention as an official at-large delegate, representing the State of Illinois. She participated primarily because of the platform. It borrowed heavily from an investigative report on industrial conditions undertaken by the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC) during Addams's tenure as president of that organization. The platform called for an eight-hour working day, an end to child labor, workplace safety standards, improved housing conditions, and insurance for industrial accidents, unemployment, and old age, the very issues to which Addams had devoted the previous two decades of her life. The platform also called for new democratic political

Problems," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7, no. 1 (2010): 1-7, at 4. Burkean conservatism is quite different from ideologically based conservatism, whether the ideology is based on free-market, libertarian, or religious principles. Among those in the U.S. today who call themselves conservative, Burkean conservatives are very rare.

² John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927, reprinted in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 235-372, at 279, 286, 325.

measures, including women's suffrage, direct primaries, initiative and referendum, and the direct election of senators.³

Addams was attacked from all sides for her actions. Colleagues in social reform and women's suffrage criticized her for crossing the line from non-partisan social reformer to partisan politician. The peace community criticized her for endorsing a platform that recommended increased military expenditures. African-American leaders criticized her for remaining with the party after its Credentials and Platform Committees refused to seat black convention delegates from the South and rejected a plank calling for equal civil and political rights for African-Americans. Addams's decision to remain did not come easily. She called a meeting of prominent African-American and white Chicagoans to consider whether she should leave the convention. Dr. C. E. Bentley, a leader in the Chicago NAACP, told a reporter, "Her disappointment was so apparent that it became noised about that Miss Addams would bolt the

³ Louise W. Knight, *Jane Addams: Spirit in Action* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 170-171; Sidney M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 125-26; "Standards of Living and Labor: Report of the Committee," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections*, 39th Annual Session, June 12-19, 1912, Cleveland (Fort Wayne, IN: Fort Wayne Printing Co., 1912), 376-436, http://books.google.com/books?id=KXESAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_s ummary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed July 9, 2012) ; Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 14.

convention.” Addams did not bolt.⁴ Instead, she gave one of two speeches seconding Roosevelt’s nomination as the party’s presidential candidate and campaigned vigorously on the platform’s—and Roosevelt’s—behalf.⁵

Addams’s actions and compromises were an experiment in real time of the process of democratic, pragmatist political reconstruction. Hers was the sort of concrete experience from which pragmatist theory emerges and to which it must return for validation.⁶ First I will show how Addams and Dewey agree that politics needs to be reconstructed along pragmatist lines, and then use Addams’s experiences to bring out the Burkean conservatism of Dewey’s political philosophy.

I.

Reconstructing Politics Pragmatically. A typical narrative is that the founding fathers set up democracy in the United States using enlightenment principles of natural rights and social contract. At first participation was highly restricted. The promise of political democracy was gradually fulfilled as non-elite white men, black men, and then women were granted rights of

⁴ “Bull Moosers Seize Triangular Debate,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1912, 9; “Important Conference on the Negro,” *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1912, 8.

⁵ Jane Addams, “Speech of Miss Jane Addams in Seconding the Nomination of Theodore Roosevelt,” August 12, 1912, in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frame 460.

⁶ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 1925, reprinted in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 26, 39.

political participation. Dewey calls this narrative “mere mythology.”⁷ He and Addams reject the enlightenment abstractions underlying this account and substitute historical versions that emphasize the changing functions of government. In their narratives, the primary functions of government prior to eighteenth century revolutions were military defense and protecting feudal privileges. With the American and French revolutions, bourgeois men obtained political rights and shifted the functions of government toward supporting a free market economy for manufacturers and merchants. As industrialization and urbanization became dominant social and economic patterns, most non-elites lived cramped and stunted lives. It was time for government to assume new functions that placed humanitarian concerns at the center. The aim was to provide the conditions under which individuals in association could develop their potentialities and flourish.⁸

Dewey offers a pragmatist alternative to the enlightenment’s conception of the state. The need for a state, he writes, stems from the fact that some modes of association have indirect, far-reaching, and serious consequences that need to be cared for. The “public” includes all those so affected.⁹ The public’s political authority arises, not from a hypothetical social contract, but from the fact of being affected by these indirect consequences. Members of the state, whether public

⁷ Dewey, *Public*, 287.

⁸ Jane Addams, “Votes for Women and Other Votes,” *Survey* 28 (June 1, 1912), 367-68; Jane Addams, “Every Progressive Democratic Government Must Include Woman Suffrage,” *New York Dress*, November 1912 (attribution not verified) in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frame 589; Dewey, *Public*, Chapter 3.

⁹ Dewey, *Public*, 245-46.

officials or voters, need to act in their role as citizens, responsible for the public interest.¹⁰ The examples Dewey gives of legal measures that would guard the public interest match many of the planks in the 1912 Progressive Party platform: to make industrial workplaces safe and healthy, to provide for health and old-age insurance, and [to](#) insure a living wage.¹¹

Addams's pragmatist understanding of politics is clear in her reply to criticisms from colleagues in social reform and women's suffrage who objected when she crossed the line into partisan politics.¹² The line between philanthropic endeavors and politics is not fixed, Addams writes, but changes with historical conditions. Its location is to be ascertained empirically, i.e., pragmatically.¹³ Since founding Hull House Addams had lived close to what she called the "human wreckage of industry." She and colleagues in social reform had organized and advocated for two decades, calling on public officials to address the root causes of this wreckage. These issues were national in scope; only federal regulation would be powerful enough to prevail against powerful corporate interests.¹⁴ Municipal and state governments had in fact been

¹⁰ Dewey, *Public*, 247, 252-53, 282-83.

¹¹ Dewey, *Public*, 274-75.

¹² See Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams*, 1973, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 192-194; and Knight, *Spirit*, 179-180 for specific examples of people who criticized Addams's direct participation in politics.

¹³ Jane Addams, "Philanthropy and Politics," September 18, 1912, in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frame 513; see also Dewey, *Public*, 275.

¹⁴ Jane Addams, "My Experience as a Progressive Delegate," *McClure's Magazine*, November 1912, 12-14, at 13.

assuming new responsibilities for public health, sanitation, children's education, food safety, and regulations on safety and work hours in factories. It was now time to place these issues on the national political agenda.¹⁵ Thus Addams offers a situated, activist version of Dewey's more general account. She identifies the serious consequences of industrialization that need care, indicates that the public is in the process of being organized, and identifies what steps need to be taken next.

In Addams's mind, women's suffrage and the responsibility to engage politically for industrial amelioration were aspects of the same argument. It was anachronistic, she thought, to argue for women's suffrage on the basis of inherently equal, natural rights.¹⁶ Addams based her argument on the widely accepted historical account that in the days of hunter-gatherer societies, women were largely in charge of healthcare, sanitation, education, and food provisioning. During the industrial revolution, many of these functions moved out of women's control and into male-

¹⁵ Among her many examples, Addams gives an extended account of philanthropic efforts to provide clean milk for children in Chicago. At first, charities ran milk stations where parents could buy safe milk; then nurses gradually became hired by the city Health Department to perform this function. It became clear that dairy cows in the surrounding states had to be inspected for tuberculosis if the milk was to be safe. For children in Chicago to have safe milk, legal regulation of interstate commerce was needed. See Addams, "Philanthropy and Politics," frames 513-15.

¹⁶ Jane Addams, "Woman and the State," February 2, 1911, in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frames 96-120, at 117-118. See also Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907, repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), Chapter 7.

controlled spaces in factories, schools, and hospitals. Addams understood progressive social reform as responding to the need for governmental oversight of women's historic, humanitarian functions, ones that were then being carried out under male-controlled, exploitive industrial conditions. If these functions were to be carried out justly and humanely, and if women were again to carry out the adult responsibilities they had long performed, they had to be involved in politics.¹⁷ Through such participation, the purview of government would itself be reconstructed to encompass humanitarian responsibilities based in social justice for all.

Politics, Addams argued, is the pragmatist testing ground to which social reform movements must ultimately submit their proposals for humanitarianism and justice. In "Pragmatism in Politics" Addams attributes to "the wisest philosopher" (i.e., William James) the claim, "Philosophy is not sufficient unto itself but plunges eagerly into reality, into science, into life, there to be refreshed and rejuvenated."¹⁸ Addams's critics accused her of risking her credibility and objectivity by entering the partisan political arena. Fair enough. Yet, there is no

¹⁷ Jane Addams, "The Progressive Party and Woman Suffrage," September 1912, in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frame 498-504; Jane Addams, "The Steps by Which I Became a Progressive," September-October 1912, in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frames 505-510, at 509-10.

¹⁸ Addams, "Philanthropy and Politics," frame 520; Jane Addams, "Pragmatism in Politics," *Survey*, October 5, 1912, 11-12, at 12. Here Addams quotes Émile Boutroux's description of James. Émile Boutroux, *William James*, 2nd ed., trans. Archibald and Barbara Henderson (New York: Longman, Green, 1912), 117.

neutral standpoint. Yes, Addams acknowledged, politics is “a boiling sea of perplexing issues,” but we cannot know ahead of time which solutions are the right ones. Politics is a proper arena for testing the validity of reformers’ recommendations, and for revitalizing and humanizing public and political life.¹⁹

II.

Democratic Means Toward Political Reconstruction. In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey describes democratic means for organizing the public and thus reconstructing politics. Addams had used these means during the 1912 convention and campaign. Dewey identifies intelligence as “the observation of consequences, *as* consequences, that is, in connection with the acts from which they proceed.”²⁰ That is, one begins political reconstruction through inquiry into the sources of the consequences that need care via legal regulation. These need to be communicated so that those affected can come to share a sense of what counts as the public interest. This communication should be shaped artistically so as to touch intellects, emotions, and modes of perception.²¹ Members of the public function as a public when they act on shared commitments to the public interest, or the common good.

The Public and Its Problems poses interpretive challenges, illustrated by the extensive scholarship on what Dewey meant by “the public,” whether it was unitary or multiple, and how

¹⁹ Dewey makes the same point. “Neutrality is Non-existent.” John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922, reprinted in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 16. Addams, “Pragmatism in Politics,” 12; Addams, “My Experiences,” 13.

²⁰ Dewey, *Public*, 243.

²¹ Dewey, *Public*, 349-50.

power and conflict figured in how it emerged and functioned.²² However “the public” is interpreted, I think Addams’s construal in this case is within the family of reasonable interpretations of what Dewey meant. Dewey’s aim was to organize the public so that its members recognized their common interests. Addams expressed the same sentiment in her essays, stating that a goal for the campaign was to create national like-mindedness, expressed through people’s inner consent.²³ Her efforts were one instance of providing the means by which the public, in this case those who suffered the effects of industrial wreckage, could come to know and feel themselves as members of this public, and use their vote to direct political officials to care for these consequences. Addams began with inquiry; much of the Progressive Party platform was taken directly from extensive investigation of the consequences of industrial conditions. She viewed the campaign as an opportunity to communicate the results of the NCCC study to the electorate.²⁴ Referring to Aristotle’s notion that “politics is a school wherein

²² See James Bohman, “Participation through Publics: Did Dewey Answer Lippmann?” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7, no.1 (2010): 49-68; Eric MacGilvray, “Dewey’s Public,” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7, no.1 (2010): 31-47; Melvin Rogers, “Dewey and His Vision of Democracy,” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7, no. 1 (2010): 69-91, at 86-88.

²³ Jane Addams, “Social Justice Through National Action,” in *Nationalism: Its Need in Our Social, Industrial and Political Growth* (New York: Progressive National Committee, February 12, 1914), 6-9, at 8-9; Addams, “My Experience,” 12.

²⁴ Addams, “My Experience,” 13. Dewey’s definition of the public and his description of social inquiry as the means for ascertaining consequences that need to be cared for, are implicit in the way the study was conceived and carried out. The investigators consulted physicians, neurologists, economists, and social workers and compiled data on the effects of industry on

questions are studied, not for the sake of knowledge, but for the sake of action,” Addams reasoned that because citizens had to decide how to vote, they would have the motivation to become concerned about rates of industrial accidents or infant mortality.²⁵

Addams used Aristotle’s notion of *filia* to shape her communication artistically. People are emotional and affiliative beings, as well as cognitive ones; we are moved when good reasons are presented through a personality able to elicit sympathetic connections. She made this connection potent by associating Roosevelt with an image of Lincoln that spoke deeply to audiences of the day. In her nominating speech at the Convention, the audience would have caught Addams’s reference when she said that carrying the message of industrial amelioration and democratization to the country “will require a leader...endowed with power to interpret the common man and to identify himself with the common lot.”²⁶ In the familiar rhetorical trope, Lincoln understood the common people and led by synthesizing their concerns. Addams hoped that Roosevelt would likewise be able “to focus the scattered moral energy of our vast nation and

workers and their families. They considered the standards they articulated as indicating “the lowest stratum that should be tolerated by a community interested in self-preservation.” See “Standards,” 377. Also see Jane Addams, *Second Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 24-27.

²⁵ Addams, “My Experience,” 12-13; Addams, “Social Justice,” 9. Milkis claims that the campaign in fact was educative, with “serious ideas and elevated discourse.” See Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 183.

²⁶ “Speech of Miss Addams.”

to direct it into practical reforms.”²⁷ In analyzing her actions with the Progressive Party in terms of creating like-mindedness through artistically communicating the findings of scientific investigations, Addams gives a concrete instance of Dewey’s approach to creating a public.

In 1912 Addams ascertained that the time was right for her to enter politics in the one way that was legally open to her. Decades of experience and the NCCC study gave her solid evidence that industrial amelioration was needed. Many citizens throughout the country shared this view. Roosevelt was genuinely committed to social justice for industrial workers.²⁸ Addams, as the most famous and respected woman in America and a compelling speaker, was well positioned to be a commanding voice in the campaign. She based her decision to enter politics on a careful reading of the information available to her at that time, and campaigned in a way that could educate and organize the public.

III.

Addams’s Compromises, Addams’s participation in the convention and campaign maps onto Dewey’s understanding of pragmatist political reconstruction. That is, she did what Dewey

²⁷ Jane Addams, “The Progressive’s Dilemma: The New Party,” *American Magazine*, November 1912, 12-14, at 14. This image of Lincoln is from Nicolay and Hay’s biography and was a common rhetorical trope of the day. Roosevelt used it himself, about himself. It is true that Addams used it for political purposes during the campaign, but she also believed it was the right image of democratic leadership. It expressed how she understood her own role at Hull House and in social reform movements. See Judith Rice, *Abraham Lincoln and Progressive Reform, 1890-1920*. Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1993).

²⁸ Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 362-373.

says needs to be done. Examining the compromises Addams made will bring out features of Dewey's political philosophy that [bear](#) striking resemblance to Burke's conservatism. Addams stayed despite proposed military expenditures for two new battleships and the convention's injustices to African-Americans. Why did she compromise on these issues, both of them central to her philosophy of social democracy and social change? Addams gives a clue to her thinking in the last paragraph of "Pragmatism in Politics." She writes, "Adequate measures for social amelioration can only be carried out with the consent of all the people and the wisdom of such plans are best discussed in relation to the realization of opinion, to use John Morley's fine phrase."²⁹ "Realisation of Opinion" is the title of a chapter in Morley's 1874 book, *On Compromise*, a work widely read by Victorian era reformers. John Morley, Viscount of Blackburn, was a British politician, journalist, and writer. He knew Addams and had visited Hull-House.³⁰ In *On Compromise* Morley follows John Stuart Mill, his intellectual guide and personal friend. For Morley, as for Mill, conscience has primacy: one's first responsibility is to

²⁹ Addams, "Pragmatism in Politics,"¹². Seigfried gives a general discussion of Addams's compromises as principled and in keeping with pragmatist commitments to inquiry as experimental and cooperative, and to honoring multiple perspectives. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "The Courage on One's Convictions or the Conviction of One's Courage? Jane Addams's Principled Compromises," in *Jane Addams and the Practice of Democracy*, eds. Marilyn Fischer, Carol Nackenoff, and Wendy Chmielewski (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 40-62.

³⁰ Byron Dexter, "Morley and Compromise," *Foreign Affairs* 26, no. 2 (1948): 335-348, at 336; D.A. Hamer, *John Morley: Liberal Intellectual in Politics*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), vi; Addams, *Twenty Years*, 114.

seek and speak the truth with independence of mind. On entering the political arena, the central question becomes how to introduce change into society. Morley understands society as an organism with deep interconnections, undergoing continual evolutionary changes. People's opinions and ways of life are deeply rooted in their particular pasts. Institutional reforms are matters of adaptation in relation to these roots. A person's task intellectually is to seek and speak the truth and hold to it. A person's task as a political actor is to figure out how best to insert proposed changes within the evolutionary dynamics of the social organism.³¹

What is a politician to do when most people are not ready to embrace his or her vision of a social truth? Morley distinguishes morally legitimate compromises from morally illegitimate ones. A compromise is illegitimate when one "suppress[es] or mutilat[es]" one's opinion in order to accord with people's prejudices, that is, when one compromises what one's conscience has concluded to be true. In making a legitimate political compromise, one continues to speak the truth as one sees it. Yet one does not try to force people to acquiesce in matters to which they cannot give genuine consent. It is legitimate to propose and accept small modifications to which people can consent, as long as the proposed small changes can function as intermediary steps toward "some large progressive principle."³²

Appreciating Edmund Burke's theory of gradual social improvement, Morley writes, "To hurry on after logical perfection is to show one's self ignorant of the material of that social structure with which the politician has to deal. To disdain anything short of an organic change in thought or institution is infatuation." These organic changes can be based in part on intellectual

³¹ Hamer, *John Morley*, 21; John Morley, *On Compromise* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), 154-160.

³² Morley, *On Compromise*, 159-60, 176.

arguments and presentation of facts. They also depend on what Morley calls “the quickening of moral sensibility,” involving people’s affections, sympathies, and aspirations.³³

Addams employs Morley’s reasoning in explaining her compromises at the Progressive Party Convention.³⁴ If change is to be democratic and based on people’s inner consent, then the pace and direction of change must make sense to people from within their own intellectual, emotional, and moral sensibilities. The Progressive Party platform proved that politics had reached the point of addressing “the human wreckage in industry.” This human wreckage was close to the lived experiences of many voters, touching family, neighbors, and friends. Perhaps, Addams thought in explaining her compromise on battleships, legislative action against war would not be possible as long as citizens remained insensitive to the enormous human costs of their own industrial system. Addams had for years been speaking and writing on behalf of disarmament and international peace, fulfilling what Morley had considered her individual, intellectual responsibility. Her reasoning regarding battleships matches Morley’s criteria for legitimate compromises by political actors. Addams’s vision of international peace, understood not merely the absence of war, but as embracing just, humane relationships and living conditions, was the “large progressive principle” toward which Morley said compromises should be made. The nation was not yet ready to adopt this vision in regard to military appropriations. It

³³ Ibid., 176;181-82.

³⁴ Addams’s essay, “The Progressive Party and Social Legislation,” contained a number of unattributed direct quotations from *On Compromise*, indicating that she had the book close in mind at the time. Jane Addams, “The Progressive Party and Social Legislation,” September 18, 1912, in *The Jane Addams Papers, 1860-1960*, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), reel 47, frames 523-40.

was ready to consider legislation for industrial amelioration, and a political campaign could increase people's knowledge of and moral sensitivity toward the daily human costs of industry. Because a "more intimate appeal" could be made against industry's destruction of human life and well being, Addams decided that this was the time to swallow battleships in order to advocate politically for industrial amelioration.³⁵

Addams was deeply troubled by the Progressive Party's unjust treatment of African-Americans.³⁶ The tone of her article, "The Progressive Party and the Negro," published in *Crisis*, the NAACP journal, is sober, almost pained. Her reasoning again follows Morley's pattern. She had not compromised her intellectual responsibility to speak the truth as she saw it. She had advocated strongly for the political rights of African-Americans before the Credentials and Platform Committees and in her seconding speech. She was clear that she had crossed into the political arena, and defended doing so as the next, essential step to achieving her goals as a social reformer. However now in the arena of politics, she could not function simply as a social reformer. Here she faced the essential democratic requirement of obtaining people's inner consent. It was clearly impossible to obtain inner consent for African-American rights from those

³⁵ See Addams, *Newer Ideals*, 131; Addams, "My Experiences," 14.

³⁶ Addams told a reporter, "Some of us are much disturbed that this Progressive party which stands for human rights, should even appear not to stand for the rights of the negroes. It seems to us to be inconsistent when on one page of our newspapers we find that this party is to stand for the working man and the working woman, and to protect the rights of the children, and to prevent usurpation of the voters' rights by special interests, and on the next we find that it denies the right of the negro to take part in this movement." Quoted in Daniel Levine, *Jane Addams and the Liberal Tradition*. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971), 193.

eligible to vote—primarily white men. These rights would have to wait, she said, for “a more propitious season.”³⁷ Addams stayed with the Progressive Party because its platform gave a direction to social change that might lead to changes in the public’s intellectual, moral, and emotional sensibilities. While many segments of the population were enthusiastic about industrial reform, national unity on the issue had not yet been achieved. Many southern states completely rejected appeals for federal regulations of industry on grounds of states’ rights. They feared that if federal legislation were enacted in one area, it would threaten their states’ ability to maintain their regimes of white supremacy. Once people were willing to accept industrial reform as a national issue, worthy of federal regulation, they might become ready to address racial injustice as a national issue, as well. To bolt would be in effect to give up on politics, a necessary component of democratic change.³⁸

IV.

Pragmatism’s Political Conservatism. Addams takes us to Morley and Morley to Burke. Dewey barely mentions Burke in his published writings, although in one brief passage he

³⁷ Addams, “The Progressive Party and Social Legislation,” frame 531.

³⁸ Jane Addams, “The Progressive Party and the Negro,” *Crisis*, November 1912, 30-31. An interesting example of this was the General Federation of Women’s Club’s support for a constitutional amendment banning child labor. Southern members of the federation refused to support the amendment, although they agreed with the content. Their cited states’ rights as their reason, not wanting to back any movement that might be a precedent for federal over state legislation. See Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 124-128, 141-159.

indicates some affinity with him. In *German Philosophy and Politics*, Dewey places the Germans' view of reason as immanent in history on the opposite side of the fence from his and Burke's attention to how history actually goes with all its particular and peculiar circumstances.³⁹ Called the father of classical British conservatism, Edmund Burke is best known for his scathing critique of the French Revolution and he is often portrayed as the defender of aristocratic privilege. True enough. Nonetheless, in the process of social change, Burke's customs and Dewey's habits function analogously. For Burke, persons and societies are intricate and complicated; a given people's customs, traditions, and ways of perceiving, thinking, and feeling

³⁹ John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 1915, reprinted in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Vol. 8, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 135-204, at 184. A few scholars have discussed the relationship between Dewey and classical conservatism. Vannatta argues against Russell Kirk's characterizations of Burke and of Dewey, and shows points of convergence between them, including their appreciation of concrete historical circumstance, their opposition to violence as a method of social change, and their suspicion of change based on *a priori* principles. Seth Vannatta, "A Defense of Pragmatic Conservatism," *Humanitas* 25 (forthcoming). O'Dwyer uses Oakeshott's critique of rationalism to find points of difference and of convergence between the two philosophers. Shaun O'Dwyer, "The Classical Conservative Challenge to Dewey," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 37, no. 4 (2001): 491-514, at 508-09. Stout sees a linkage between Dewey's conception of piety and Burke's. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 34.

are a historical inheritance from their particular past.⁴⁰ For Dewey, the self with its thoughts and desires is constituted by habits, that is, energy organized into dispositions to act in particular ways. Social customs and institutions he regards as “embodied habits.”⁴¹ In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey quotes James’ description of habit as “the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative influence.” Dewey then comments, “Habit does not preclude the use of thought, but it determines the channels within which it operates. Thinking is secreted in the interstices of habits.” For both Burke and Dewey, at any given point in time, most customs and habits function unreflectively; only a few are open to revision or reconstruction.⁴²

For both thinkers, the process of social change is by the nature of the case slow and gradual. Here pragmatists’ notion of meliorism wears its conservative garb. Improvement, if it comes, comes slowly, moving through hedges of custom and habits. Burke criticized French revolutionaries for trying to reconstruct society on rational principles alone. His critique was based on observations about how people’s sensibilities are shaped by tradition. He did not think that reason was the signature human capacity; he regarded it as “fallible and feeble.” Burke predicted the French revolutionaries’ attempt would lead to violence and military dictatorship.⁴³

⁴⁰ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. 1790, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 29-30.

⁴¹ Dewey, *Human Nature*, 21, 31, 77.

⁴² Dewey, *Public*, 335; Dewey, *Human Nature*, 30-31.

⁴³ This in fact happened with the reign of terror and Napoleon’s taking control of France as Emperor. Conor Cruise O’Brien, “Edmund Burke: Prophet Against the Tyranny of the Politics of Theory,” in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 213-32, at 219-20.

He was right. Dewey was also suspicious of revolutionary attempts at political change. Social change takes place through the reconstruction of habits in selves and institutions. While a political revolution can bring about changes in some political institutions, underlying habits of thought and feeling are more resistant; overt change is often superficially layered over them. He comments, “The force of lag in human life is enormous.”⁴⁴

Dewey wanted to base pragmatist reconstruction on intelligence. Its role is to mediate, adjusting personal and institutional habits to new conditions.⁴⁵ On this definition, Burke’s recommendations for social change count as intelligent. Burke explained his method this way: “When the useful parts of an old establishment are kept, and what is superadded is to be fitted to what is retained, a vigorous mind, steady, persevering attention, various powers of comparison and combination, and the resources of an understanding fruitful in expedients, are to be exercised.” Burke was attentive to social injustices. For example, he worked to ameliorate inequities Britain had imposed on Irish Catholics and sketched a proposal for the gradual abolition of slavery.⁴⁶

One could reply that Burke, careful though he was, did not employ Dewey’s methods of systematic, experimental inquiry. When these are used, the direction of social change can be

⁴⁴ Dewey, *Human Nature*, 9, 77.

⁴⁵ John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 1935, reprinted in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 1-65, at 36, 37.

⁴⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 143; Stanley E. Ayling, *Edmund Burke: His Life and Opinions* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 90-101; Edmund Burke, “Sketch of the Negro Code,” 1780. <http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Burke/brkSWv4c7.html> (accessed July 3, 2012).

plotted more precisely and its pace increased. As James Bohman notes, Dewey's aim for social science was "to show how and under what circumstances citizens' capacities for judgment and deliberation would work well and even be improved."⁴⁷ That is, as scientific—and democratic—habits of openness, tolerance, and cooperative inquiry become embedded in individuals' characters and in social institutions, movement toward just and humane patterns of democratic living will be accelerated.⁴⁸

It is true that Burke had no patience for democracy, and his method, while thoughtful, was not experimental.⁴⁹ Yet even here, in a curious way, Addams's and Dewey's call for democratic inclusivity wears the dress of Burkean conservatism. We can see this by following more closely what Addams meant by "like-mindedness" and "inner consent," which for her are the marks of democratically achieved change. Scholars debate whether Dewey's reconstructed politics are a form of deliberative democracy.⁵⁰ If Dewey meant what Addams meant, then

⁴⁷ Bohman, "Participation," 54.

⁴⁸ See Dewey *Public*, 358-59; David L. Hildebrand, "Pragmatic Democracy: Inquiry, Objectivity, and Experience," *Metaphilosophy* 42, no. 5 (2011): 589-604, at 593. Like Dewey, Burke suggests that plans for improvement should be socially generated; those "inferior in understanding" often make observations that improve the plans of their superiors. He writes, "By a slow but well-sustained progress, the effect of each step is watched; the good or ill success of the first gives light to us in the second; and so, from light to light, we are conducted with safety through the whole series." Burke, *Reflections*, 143-44.

⁴⁹ For a thoughtful discussion of Burke's opposition to democracy, see Stout, 213-24.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Robert B. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, (2005), 187-200; and Shane

deliberation is a part of it, but only a part. Achieving “like-mindedness” for Addams is part intellectual communication, part *filia*. ”In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams clarifies that this takes more than deliberative discussions. It is a matter of enlarging one’s experiences on “the thronged and common road.” As one walks with others, one confronts perplexities, realizes the measure of one’s own prejudices, and moves toward sympathetic understanding with one’s fellow travelers. Through this process one’s intellectual, moral, and emotional sensibilities, or habits, are reshaped.⁵¹ Inner consent certifies that like-mindedness has been attained. This notion of inner consent can be traced back at least to Jonathan Edwards and the distinction he made between the *assent* of the understanding and the *consent* of the will and heart.⁵² When like-mindedness and inner consent obtain, new proposals are on their way to fitting companionably with already established habits.

Morley notes that, for Burke, progress through politics “depends upon small modifications.” On this point, conservative Burke and progressive Addams and Dewey, agree. Addams observes that social progress comes through “gradual modification.” Dewey makes the same observation, noting, “The greatest change, once it is accomplished, is simply the outcome

Ralston, “Dewey’s Theory of Moral (and Political) Deliberation Unfiltered,” *Education and Culture* 26, no.1 (2010): 23-43.

⁵¹ Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 7; “Introduction,” and Chapter 1.

⁵² Norman S. Fiering, “Will and Intellect in the New England Mind,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 29, no. 4 (1972): 516-58, at 557, quoting Edwards, *Humble Inquiry*. In another context, Addams included joy in self-sacrifice, if required, in the notion of inner consent. See *Twenty Years*, 9.

of a vast series of adaptations and responsive accommodations, each to its own particular situation.”⁵³ Dewey admitted that even when inquiry is well-honed, people’s intellectual and emotional habits make them resistant to inquiry’s results. I suspect that even with inquiry, the lag to which Dewey refers will at most shrink from enormous to merely large.⁵⁴

Even when proposals for social change are based on intelligence, contingencies interrupt. “The world,” Dewey writes, is “uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconstant.... The *world* is precarious and perilous.” Dewey’s world includes nature, human persons, and social institutions. Even when methods of intelligence are used, Dewey acknowledges that “the fundamentally hazardous character of the world is not seriously modified, much less eliminated.”⁵⁵ Burke implies as much, given his pessimism of humans’ ability to predict or control the future. Just two years after Addams made her carefully reasoned compromises, the most violent of contingencies—war—decimated peoples and lands, and with them, the public’s sensibilities toward industrial amelioration, peace, and racial justice.

V.

Democracy and Tragedy. Scholars debate whether Dewey’s philosophy includes a sense of the tragic. Cornel West claims that among pragmatists, only James and Royce have what he calls “a tragic temperament.” Raymond Boisvert argues that the modern scientific method at the heart of Dewey’s philosophy is antithetical to tragedy. Robert Westbrook agrees with Sidney

⁵³ Morley, *On Compromise*, 176; Addams, *Second Twenty Years*, 407; Dewey, *Public*, 287. In his lectures in China, Dewey elaborated on this point. See Westbrook’s discussion, *John Dewey*, 244-45.

⁵⁴ Dewey, *Public*, 340-41.

⁵⁵ Dewey, *Experience*, 43-44, 45; See also Dewey, *Human Nature* 200.

Hook that Dewey's meliorism is a response to tragic situations, and notes that Dewey became increasingly sensitive to the tragic dimensions of life as he aged.⁵⁶ Addams's experiences at the 1912 convention point to one location where the tragic resides in the tissue of pragmatist political reconstruction. They make concrete the meaning of Dewey's admission, "Everything that man achieves and possesses is got by actions that may involve him in other and obnoxious consequences in addition to those wanted and enjoyed."⁵⁷ Like Antigone, Addams was forced by the situation to choose between deeply held principles that would, in a happier world, serve as companionable guides. She was committed to industrial justice and to racial justice, and to curing these ills by democratic means. At that time, there was a possibility of addressing through democratic politics the exploitation, injury, and death that industry brought to millions of industrial workers. There was no possibility for addressing through democratic politics the exploitation, injury, and death visited upon millions of African Americans through denial of their civil and political rights. Addams ascertained that justice for African Americans needed to "wait until a more propitious season." Yet the interim would not be morally static. Injustices would

⁵⁶ Cornel West, "Pragmatism and the Sense of the Tragic," in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 174-82, at 174; Sidney Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 13-16, 19-22; Westbrook, *John Dewey*, 416; Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, 112; Raymond D. Boivert, "The Nemesis of Necessity: Tragedy's Challenge to Deweyan Pragmatism" in *Dewey Reconfigured: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism*, eds. Casey Haskins and David I. Seiple (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 151-68, at 154-58, 161.

⁵⁷ Dewey, *Experience*, 44. In context, Dewey is describing life in early human history. In the next paragraph he writes that this observation is equally true at the current time.

continue and multiply; deeply entrenched habits would issue in repeated acts of injustice. One becomes complicit; one cannot “do no harm.”

While bolting the convention may have seemed like the righteous way out, Addams worried that appeals to righteousness could in fact be little more than cover for motives of self-righteousness.⁵⁸ Addams posed the question in a deeply personal way. “I asked myself most searchingly whether my Abolitionist father would have remained in any political convention in which colored men had been treated slightly.” She took her father’s advice to work out her own responses to morally complex situations, and her conscience gave her a different answer than her father’s conscience might have given him.⁵⁹ For this she needed more than Morley; she needed Lincoln. Her father had been to her an exemplar of moral rectitude, and it took years of pain and reflection to replace his inner light with Lincoln’s more democratic and morally ambiguous pattern.⁶⁰ Yes, Addams engaged in political rhetoric when she associated Roosevelt with Lincoln’s image. But it was more than rhetoric; Addams believed in the image. It was the one she had adopted for herself for her work at Hull-House.⁶¹

⁵⁸ This was in fact her response to critics who said she should avoid political engagement in order to preserve her own impartiality and objectivity. See Addams, “Philanthropy and Politics,” frames 520-21.

⁵⁹ Addams, “Progressive Party and the Negro,” 30-31.

⁶⁰ We can read the first two chapters of *Twenty Years* as charting this transition. See also Louise W. Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 328-29.

⁶¹ In *Twenty Years* Addams tells of handing out copies of Carl Schurz’s *Abraham Lincoln*, to youngsters in the boys club (p. 23). Schurz’s book was based on his extensive review

Addams articulated this image in a speech to the Progressive Party's Lincoln Day Dinner in 1914. Here she wrestled with the tension that industrial amelioration posed for a democracy. The U.S. lagged behind nations such as Belgium and Germany that had succeeded in controlling large industries through the power of their centralized governments. Addams rejected this route for a democracy. For true *self*-government, ultimate control must lie in the hands of the people. Although the Union itself was not threatened in 1912 as it had been during the Civil War, Addams saw parallels between the current task and Lincoln's. He had to figure out how both to preserve the Union and [to](#) eliminate slavery by democratic consent. She noted that to do this, Lincoln had "made a synthesis of the feelings of those people and constantly interpreted them to themselves." He had not tried to persuade the people of the rightness of his own ideas; rather, "he revealed their own higher visions to themselves and they looked upon him as a synopsis of the higher life of the American people." This process of obtaining inner consent was democratic. The tragedy was the price paid in the interim: a ghastly war and continued enslavement and oppression of African Americans.⁶²

of Nicolay and Hay's biography of Lincoln. The traits Schurz emphasized were individuality (or personality, as opposed to will), sympathy, and democracy. See Carl Schurz, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), 31-36, 93-95. These are the same traits that Addams emphasized in her portrait of a settlement worker. Dwelling among the immigrants, settlement workers were not to impose their program through force of will, but were to come to know their neighbors as neighbors through sympathetic understanding.

⁶² Addams, "Social Justice," 8-9. In Dewey's letter to Alice Dewey describing his talk with Addams about the Pullman Strike, he recounted that she had said, "We freed the slaves by

Addams's reasons for staying with the convention reflect the tension she describes in "A Modern Lear," her analysis of the Pullman strike, where she writes, "The man who insists upon consent, who moves with the people, is bound to consult the feasible right as well as the absolute right. He is often obliged to attain only Mr. Lincoln's "best possible," and often have the sickening sense of compromising with his best convictions."⁶³ Concrete experience is not gentle on principles. Burke talks about how rights derived from reason are refracted and bent when they enter lived reality. Addams comments that while waiting for the more propitious moment, our principles will be "jostled and marred" by each other.⁶⁴ A sickening sense of compromise escorts us through tragic points in pragmatist reconstruction.

Addams's experiences with the Progressive Party give a particularly good test case for Dewey's proposals because they set in stark relief Morley's reminder not to ignore "the material...with which the politician has to deal." Addams had to choose among the many habits that needed reconstruction. She was dealing with entrenched habits of gender, race, and class oppression, some of the toughest social and political issues. She worked with flawed people, including Roosevelt, who was genuinely committed to industrial amelioration, but also an enthusiastic militarist and an accomplished political chameleon. If Addams's compromises make us uneasy, then Dewey's project for democratic political reconstruction should do the same. For Dewey, as for Addams, to reconstruct politics pragmatically, real people have to enter the

war and now had to free them all over again individually and pay the costs of the war and reckon with the added bitterness of the Southerner besides." Quoted in Westbrook, *John Dewey*, 80-81.

⁶³ Jane Addams, "A Modern Lear," *Survey* 29, November 2, 1912, 131-137, at 137.

⁶⁴ Burke, *Reflections* 52; Addams, "The Progressive Party and Social Legislation," frame 531.

political arena in real time and face those recalcitrant, irritating bundles of habits that constitute persons and institutions. They must learn, as Addams says, to value “the imperfect good so painfully acquired and, at the best, so mixed with evil.”⁶⁵ They must risk contingencies that make mockery of all their efforts. To act politically is to risk reinforcing evil, as some have argued that Addams’s compromises did.⁶⁶ Yet not to act politically also risks complicity with evil. Addams’s brief foray into politics poignantly demonstrates the Burkean conservative character of pragmatist political reconstruction and the tragic compromises it can entail.

[University of Dayton](#)

[Dayton, Ohio](#)

⁶⁵ Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 98. The context of the quotation was Hull-
House’s efforts to unseat Johnny Powers, their ward’s corrupt politician.

⁶⁶ Gerstle comments, “It is not too much to say that the refusal to seat black delegates set a precedent that would haunt liberal politics for much of the rest of the twentieth century. Gary Gerstle, “Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 1280-1307, at 1306. Milkis concludes, “There was a real sense, however, in which Progressives sacrificed the rights of the dispossessed—especially of African Americans—for the false hope of forging a national interest.” Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 166.