

The Reception of American Pragmatism in Europe

June 6th to 8th 2019
University of St. Gall (HSG), St. Gall, Switzerland

Organized by Federica Gregoratto and Michael G. Festl on behalf of the John Dewey-Center
Switzerland in St. Gall.

Call for Papers

It is a common assumption that at least until the middle of the 20th century philosophical exchange between Europe and North-America has merely been a one-way street, with Europe on the giving side and North-America on the receiving side of the relationship. In fact, early North-American philosophy is unthinkable without European philosophical traditions such as Scottish Common Sense Philosophy as well as German and British Idealism. Already in the second half of the 19th century, however, a genuinely philosophical school emerges in the United States – Pragmatism. While Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) can be viewed as a forerunner, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and William James (1842–1919) are its official founders.

American Pragmatism's impact on Europe is remarkably quick. Peirce's seminal paper "The Fixation of Belief" was translated into French as early as 1878, thus providing the starting point for a reception of as well as a controversy over Pragmatist ideas in Europe that has proven fruitful until the present day. At the beginning of the 20th century, James is at the forefront of European engagements with Pragmatism. From the 1920s onwards, John Dewey (1859–1952) – the third principal figure of Pragmatism – dominates the reception. One of the most outstanding – and still too often neglected – episodes in the reception of pragmatist ideas in Europe is the impact of Jane Addams (1860-1935). Addams, an influential social reformer, who worked closely with but also, at times, critically against Dewey, is increasingly seen as a prominent figure of the Pragmatist movement. In 1931, she received one of the highest honors Europe bestows, the Nobel Peace Prize. In the 1980s, German thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas and Hans Joas have shifted the reception's center of attention to the pragmatist sociology of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Today, the reception of American Pragmatism in Europe is stronger than ever. It covers the whole range of Pragmatist thought, from philosophy to psychology, from neuroscience to sociology and much more. Moreover, the pragmatist method has recently proven to be useful for understanding mechanisms of oppression rooted in gender, ethnic and economic factors in ways that the European context can much profit from.

While the conference is open to all aspects of the history of the reception of American Pragmatism in Europe, there are three core inquiries:

1. First, the conference is interested in the changing cycles of the reception, from the European exorcizing of Pragmatism as a philosophy solely interested in the "cash value" of ideas to its appreciation as the paradigmatic philosophy in a plural and constantly changing world.

2. Second, it investigates how and to what extent we can speak of a unified European reaction to Pragmatism and, at the same time, expounds on episodes of a multifaceted reception that are characteristic of different regions in Europe (e.g. Southern, Central, Eastern Europe, the Nordic Countries, the British Isles, etc.).

3. Third, the conference explores the contributions that American Pragmatism can still make with regard to contemporary European challenges, from the political and economic relations between the EU and the United States, to the formation and the identity of a European community, from immigration to populism, from the crisis of democracy to new social movements, from current scientific and economic challenges to innovative and intelligent solutions for social life. In this context, the relationship between so-called *American Pragmatism* and Latin/South/Indigenous American philosophy can also be taken into consideration with the aim of gathering new and transformative insights for Europe.

Invited Speakers: Chiara Ambrosio (London), James Campbell (Toledo, Ohio), Núria Sara Miras Boronat (Barcelona), Emmanuel Renault (Paris), Henrik Rydenfelt (Helsinki), Arvi Särkelä (Lucerne), Dennis Sölch (Düsseldorf), Dieter Thomä (St. Gall), Emil Višňovský (Bratislava).

There is a limited number of spots available for papers pertinent to the topic of the conference. Young scholars are especially encouraged to apply. We are committed to creating a friendly and vibrant environment where to receive constructive feedback and inspiration. If you are interested, please send an abstract (word-document) of no more than 400 words to federica.gregoratto@unisg.ch and michael.festl@unisg.ch until January 31 2019 or earlier. We are going to notify you whether you can take part in the conference at the end of February 2019.