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JANE ADDAMS AND WICKED PROBLEMS:
PUTTING THE PRAGMATIC METHOD TO USE

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Abstract: Melioration of many social problems today requires a feminist pragmatist methodology since these problems are not only dynamically complex, but inherently wicked. That is, many of our social problems are characterized by intense disagreement, conflicting objectives, as well as high levels of uncertainty, variability and risk. Especially relevant to – but ignored by – current wicked problems scholars, early feminist-pragmatist Jane Addams illustrates how the pragmatic method is applicable to these wicked problems by employing this methodology on the ground in confronting the wicked problems of her time. In the end, I argue Addams ultimately provides valuable insights on how to go about tackling these problems in our own time.

“To attain individual morality in an age demanding social morality, to pride oneself on the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment, is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation.”

- Jane Addams

Melioration of most social problems today – problems like health care and environmental justice – requires a feminist pragmatist methodology¹ because many of these problems are not *only* dynamically complex, but inherently *wicked*. That is, many of our social problems today are characterized by intense disagreement between fragmented stakeholders, multiple and often conflicting objectives, as well as high levels of uncertainty, variability and risk. While the

burgeoning field of wicked problems implicitly relies on a feminist pragmatist methodology, it fails to do so explicitly and could benefit from a more direct and nuanced grounding.

Especially relevant to – but ignored by – current wicked problems scholars, I argue feminist-pragmatist Jane Addams illustrates how the pragmatic method is applicable to solving wicked problems by employing this methodology on the ground in confronting the wicked problems of her time (i.e., poverty, immigration, women’s rights, and labor reform among others). I also argue her work provides us with valuable insights on how to go about tackling these problems *in our own time*. Reanimating Addams as one of the earliest to collaboratively address wicked problems through the pragmatic method is valuable not least because she has largely been remembered as the first proto-social worker and/or as an inspirational philanthropist. Both of these characterizations are at best partial and at worst misleading. Addams consistently disdained the uninformed and high-handed charity worker, arguing instead for co-action. Beyond these characterizations, there have been further efforts to recall Addams as an American philosopher. In this light, her writings have frequently been dismissed as “derivative” of the founding pragmatists and thus not significant. The following paper proves this characterization to not only be mistaken, but also extremely unfortunate.

A feminist pragmatist methodology fruitfully expands on aspects of WP work currently undeveloped and/or underdeveloped by WP scholars. In particular, Addams’s insights on the need for cooperative action, her advocacy for the expansion of our ethical framework, and her work on perplexity will be shown to be foundational to tackling wicked problems. Indeed, her role as a public philosopher, social reformer, and facilitator are far more in line with both the recommendations following from the pragmatic method and the WP scholarship than is the efforts of most current philosophers today. Along these lines, her life’s greatest work, Hull

House, will be shown to be a highly effective bridge institution, providing a key, relatively stable, yet flexible space from which work bridging institutional, political, educational and moral divides was done. In addition, her writings fruitfully expands the current WP scholarship through her nuanced understanding of the need for fellowship, sympathetic understanding, and reciprocity.

Defining Wicked Problems

Wicked problems are not “morally wicked, but diabolical in that they resist all the usual attempts to resolve them” (Brown 4). Such problems were originally identified in contrast to “tame” problems, problems easily defined and solved one-dimensionally. The term was introduced in a 1973 article on city planning by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber and has more recently taken root in a wider array of literature on the environment. Wicked problems are dynamically complex and ill-structured, with no straight-forward causal connections to help us gain a clear and simple picture of the issue. Instead, such problems are obstinate and indefinable, influenced by many dynamic and complex factors (Batie). They confront us with high levels of uncertainty in situations where both action and inaction carry high-stakes. They are thus not amenable to final resolutions but cannot simply be ignored.

Adding to the difficulties here we also know that stakeholders involved in many of these wicked problems are separated from one another, have widely different interests and values, tolerate different levels of risk, and seek separate and sometimes conflicting end-goals (Salwasser 9). Such structural fragmentation explains why another “key theme in the [wicked problems] literature” calls for “the introduction of bottom up (participatory) tactics and interdisciplinary collaboration” (Thompson and Whyte 2). Such a call is also supported by a skepticism of neutrality, of experts proffering the final word, and of any claim that facts and values can be

separated. Our facts are instead always incomplete and capable of multiple interpretations. Pragmatist and WP scholar Bryan Norton reminds us that our values and commitments shape not only what we see when we examine a problem, but also what we experience (ix). In the end, then, wicked problems “require solutions that challenge the current practices of the society that generated them” (Brown 6). Thus, effective responses require the mobilization of people in their community, engaging in deep and sustaining dialogue which seeks to integrate general scientific information with community values.

Addams’s Social Ethics

Addams’s life provides us with a long list of on-the-ground efforts to cope with wicked problem situations. Addams realized early on that work towards meliorating communal problems began without much community support or initial involvement tended to fail quickly.² From these failures she quickly learned to operate through *cooperative action*. For example, she begins her chapter on “Industrial Amelioration” by noting “the great difficulty we experience in reducing to action our imperfect code of social ethics arises from the fact that we have not yet learned to act together” (“Democracy and Social” 63). She compares attempts at cooperative action to the “wavering motions of a baby’s arm before he has learned to coordinate his muscles.” Our struggles to cooperate effectively are especially problematic because the needs of her time – and ours – *demand* “associated effort,” not simply individual effort. While attempts at collaboration consistently appear to be slow and “ineffective,” collaboration has greater social value than “effective individual action” (63). Addams illustrates this argument throughout her work, but analyzes here the relationship between the factory owner and his employees as a prime example. As we will see, her description of this situation aligns in many ways with the description of a wicked problem.

The Pullman strike in 1894, by non-unionized workers, was caused in no small measure because of reduced wages as well as discontent with management and with the town laws built and enforced by the employer. According to Addams, underlying this problem was the rigidity with which an individual ethic was applied to a social situation. For instance, the president was convinced he only needed “to test the righteousness of the process by his own feelings” (“Democracy and Social” 66). Neither side was willing to see the other’s point of view. Addams notes that this problem got its start because of individual management organizing not only the working conditions, but also the living conditions of a vast number of people without ever consulting those same people, applying an authoritative strategy when collaboration would have been more effective.

As occurred in the Pullman strike, high levels of disagreement between stakeholders are one of the characteristics of a wicked problem. Similarly, like many social issues, this situation involved factors beyond any one person’s control. In the Pullman strike, for instance, the various parties could not agree on what *the problem was* and thus could not find common ground for meliorating the problem. Also relevant to this strike is the WP criterion that both action and inaction carry high-stakes consequences. Pullman’s ethic is in direct contrast to WP scholars’ recommendation that emphasis be placed on the people involved, not on the initial divisions at play (Allen and Gould 23) as well as the consistent recommendation that local knowledge is essential to any attempt to meliorate shared problems. Addams's analysis highlights just these deficits, pointing to the need for social ethics and collective action.

For Addams, it is a mistake to narrow our frame of reference in order to pretend towards neutrality. Instead, she advocates for expanding our ethic ever outward so that we can “supplement” a “family conscience” with a “social and an industrial conscience” (“Settlement as

a Factor” 48-9). It is through the expansion of our ethical framework that we find a means of working within difference and begin the search for common ground.³ In confronting wicked problem situations we are most likely to encounter large epistemological, ethical, and political gulfs. She concludes we must relinquish the idea that we can ever truly “settle our perplexities by mere good fighting.” Indeed, this competitive drive is denounced as a “childish conception of life” (“Settlement as a Factor” 57). The drive towards rampant competition is also listed as a consistent reason why we fail to more comprehensively address our wicked problems.

Supplanting initial divisive certainties with “perplexities” is key to Addams’ methodology. Her work on perplexities also sheds helpful light on how we can begin to open others up to the various and conflicting dimensions of the problems we confront. For instance, writing again about the push and pull of “industrial stress and strain,” Addams says “the community is confronted by a moral perplexity.” According to Addams, this perplexity provides the community with the opportunity to realize what at first appeared to be “a choice between virtue and vice” may really be a “choice between virtue and virtue” (“Democracy and Social” 77). Key to Hull House was its commitment to engage in these perplexities. Avoiding perplexity encourages one to remain committed to individualized ideals at the expense of community growth and inquiry. Addams’s use of perplexity thus supports WP scholar Valerie Brown’s conclusions: our efforts towards tackling wicked problems consistently yield complications. According to Brown, this means our collective efforts should be characterized simply as the best we could do at the time (4). More than this, though, Addams’s emphasis on perplexity encourages “non-habitual” actions and collaboration (Schneiderhan 596). Across the board, our analyses of wicked problems will reveal a long list of perplexities. This list leads us away from initial commitments to individualized, ideal solutions and moves us towards the consideration of

ameliorative actions under an experimental and iterative methodology. Perplexity opens the door for new understandings, genuine collaboration, and thus mutual, creative and ameliorative transformation of seriously troubling social messes.

Fellowship, Sympathetic Understanding, and Collective Action

Addams suggested the expansion of our ethical framework could be aided through the growth of fellowship. She was particularly concerned that people were often living side-by-side, but “without fellowship” (“Subjective Necessity” 16). She argued success depends on consulting “all of humanity” to figure out “what the people want and how they want it” (“Subjective Necessity” 22). Consistently emphasizing one’s own point of view over time reduces the likelihood that one will build “a simple human relationship” with those others involved in the problem. In our original example, for instance, Pullman built “sanitary houses and beautiful parks,” indeed, he built an entire town for his employees (“Democracy and Social” 68). However, his drive to be “good ‘to’ people rather than ‘with’ them” separated him from the “moral life” of those he judged. A lack of fellowship leaves us with no opportunity for “sensitiveness or gratitude;” it drives a “divergence between ourselves and others” as well as “cruel misunderstandings” (70).

Norton, for instance, tells his reader the divide and isolation between environmental economists and ethicists today has led not only to two very different understandings of our environmental troubles, but also to large misunderstandings when the two paths do cross. This divides and limits perspectives, stymieing more comprehensive efforts to address these problems. A willingness to act *with* others is essential to developing fellowship and this is essential to recognizing our interdependency, our connectivity. In general, WP scholars consistently point to the serious problems which arise out of our isolation, though they do not

point so deliberately to the need for fellowship. Addams scholar Judy Whipps, for instance, points out Addams's consistent drive to build community "with" others. Addams's lifelong work can be seen as an effort to build and foster "joint associations" where co-action is more likely to work effectively (Whipps 122). Collective efforts are fostered by fellowship building and Addams's work brings this component to the forefront.⁴

WP scholars, however, do hint at the necessity of fellowship by arguing collective action is most likely to occur when we recognize our interdependency, when we are willing to innovate, and when we are ready to interact with others (Van Bueran et al. 210). For Addams, "there is nothing more devastating to the inventive faculty, nor fatal to a flow of mind and spirit, than the constant feeling of loneliness and the absence of fellowship" ("Democracy and Social" 54). In fact, Whipps calls our attention to Addams's particular brand of communitarianism, requiring we do precisely what Van Bueran et al. suggest: "seek out diverse voices." Addams recognized a need for such work on a global scale and in such a way that our effort here actually "informs the power and authority of political decision-making" (119). In the end, Addams was striving to "open up a public space for community engagement," focusing on our "inherent interdependence and diversity" (120, 122).

Collective action, however, is unlikely to occur when we fail to interact with various stakeholders, when our strategies are inconsistent with one another, when we operate under the belief that everyone else is working only in their own self-interest, and when we deeply distrust one another (Van Bueran et al. 207). Van Bueran et al. talk about "dialogues of the deaf" where we talk *at* and not *with* one another. Addams was also quite aware of this; she consistently warns her reader about how difficult and slow collective action can be. She warns that too many *individual* "good deeds" encourage us to see only our own "personal plan of improvement" until

our point of view is “beyond reproach.”⁵ Harkening to John Dewey, Addams concludes here that habit – disconnected from the varying perspectives of diverse others – captivates people, encouraging resistance no matter the “changing conditions” of the times (“Democracy and Social” 68). The moral, civic and mental perspectives unreflective habits cultivate lead to the failure to comprehend “the great moral lesson which our times offer” (66). This means, as Brown warns, we are less likely to grasp “different ways of thinking,” pursue our problems with imagination or creativity, or pull on a wide range of “intellectual resources” (4-5). The problem is not that we praise individual creativity and ingenuity, but that we regard individual achievements “as complete in a social sense when” such achievements have yet to move beyond individual actions (72). Instead, individual efforts should work to “procure other results by the community as well as for the community” (73). Genuine social progress requires that social initiatives take hold.⁶

Addams consistently highlights the importance of sympathetic understanding in moving us towards collaboration. As noted, she illustrates the move towards sympathetic understanding in part by arguing for the expansion of familial ethics. Addams is in fact working to expand our notion of the familiar through the metaphor of family, encouraging a larger move into non-familiar social relations. Sympathetic understanding is the means by which we make this move; it requires us to get outside ourselves, to see our experiences as another would, to try to explain ourselves so another can understand (Seigfried 93). We all know of people, on the other hand, “who are often insensible to their own mistakes and harsh in their judgments of other people because they are so confident of their own inner integrity” (48). In “Household Adjustment,” she illustrates this insight by pointing out the narrow and misguided ethic of many of the well-off women of her time, who – so confident in their own moral code – fail to see the social

dimensions of the household worker's life. By carefully filling out the various dimensions of this issue, she demonstrates the complexities involved. This aligns with Valerie Brown's suggestions that we must value other ways of constructing knowledge. Brown argues we pay particular attention to not simply individual knowledge, but also community, indigenous, organizational and holistic knowledge (69-73). In fleshing out these dimensions of household labor Addams teases out these various knowledge structures.

In general, Addams's emphasis on sympathetic understanding can be traced through her writings, through "her immersion in the particular." She believed we could better "articulate wider meaning through powerful depictions of individual suffering, joy, hope, and despair" (Elshtain xxxi). For instance, she argued that the ideal of the self-supporting family cannot be ethically wielded to encourage the young to work before their time. This narrow frame, uninformed by the experience of others and a plethora of perspectives, fails to see the larger picture: the continuous lowering of wages, the untenable conditions for the child laborer, increasing illiteracy, the arresting of moral and intellectual development ("Subjective Necessity" 22-3).

Thus, sympathetic understanding requires more than the *tolerating* of difference. It calls on us to actively seek out the perspective of others. According to Seigfried, "it seeks to gain insight into the individuated worlds of experience of others and the values they hold that make these worlds cohere. This insight is only available from a perspective of caring" (222). Sympathetic understanding is a keystone towards effective collaboration; as Addams's careful articulation of sympathetic understanding separates it from a more common and simplistic understanding of charity. Lisa Yun Lee argues Addams's commitment to reciprocity forecloses any idea of a simple giving-to others. In truth, sympathetic understanding directly challenges

“the authority of mere expertise by deliberately seeking to involve those for whom the situation was problematic or disadvantageous in the first place” (Seigfried 182). In this reciprocity there is also a call for diversity (Bardwell-Jones and Hamington 5). This emphasis on diversity properly positions the individual for more thoroughly addressing wicked problem situations.⁷ Under this methodology, we are doing *with*, not doing *for*. While WP scholars recognize the problem of a narrow and individualized ethic, they do not do much work on the need for fellowship.⁸

Hull-House: Bridging the Gaps

Hull House, the first social settlement in Chicago (opening in September of 1889), was in fact a key boundary institution, fulfilling an essential role necessary for the kinds of collaborative efforts needed to tackle wicked problems.⁹ For instance, Mattias Gross argues, “Addams and her co-workers perceived the laboratory experiment as an inferior variation of the experiment in society.” Her work advocated for a more consistent and explicit link between “knowledge production and knowledge application” (81). Indeed, Hull House played a fundamental role in linking suppliers to users of knowledge, in no small part by operating as a boundary institution for local immigrants, connecting them to various institutions, disseminating important knowledge and facilitating transitional efforts. For instance, literally existing in the space between two worlds, Addams describes the “interpretation bureau” as one of Hull House’s most important functions. This bureau was one of Hull House’s most important endeavors precisely because it disseminated knowledge about institutional structures and procedures to recently arrived immigrants, effectively linking immigrants to essential services, and thus helping them navigate the system. In this way, Hull House operated as an effective bridge. In truth, *Twenty Years at Hull House* is full of examples of collaborative efforts between Hull House, the

surrounding residents, various groups/organizations and surrounding institutions. The fostering of such networks was always emphasized as a means of working *with* others, not *on* or *for* them.

In a number of different ways wicked problem scholars highlight the essential nature of *bridge* institutions for the kind of collaboration across institutional boundaries that is necessary for adequately addressing wicked problems. For example, Norton highlights the problems with towering and the need to overcome isolation, Batie references boundary organizations, and Van Bueren et al. argue for policy arenas. In general, our failure to act together has consistent cognitive, social, and institutional causes. For instance, a lack of social interaction facilitates cognitive barriers like a commitment to rampant self-interest and vastly different perceptual understandings of the issue. Likewise, with no supporting or mediating institutions, there are few-to-no incentives to foster interaction or to break down cognitive barriers.

Batie, in explicating the value of boundary organizations, reminds us that there is a problematic divide between those who *do* the science and those who *use* the science. This separation between research and application is inherently troubling.¹⁰ Expert ideas and “solutions,” when separated from very real, “on the ground” problems and the people intimately involved, can too easily cause greater problems. Instead, we should push to restructure the relationship between citizen and expert. In general, boundary organizations also 1) invite different perspectives into the dialogue, 2) are accountable to other organizations involved in the issue, 3) work to generate new knowledge on the matter, *and* 4) communicate the knowledge to all stakeholders while actively seeking alternatives (Batie 1182). It takes no great leap to see that Hull House operated in these capacities.

Hull House, for example, intentionally situated itself between different perspectives, cultures, and groups within Chicago through its connections to the university, the local schools,

the various institutions and the surrounding residents. Key to the work of boundary organizations, Addams describes Hull House as “accountable to *all* sides” (“Objective Value” 32, *emphasis mine*). Along these lines, WP scholar David Freeman says work on local wicked problems requires the mobilization of people in their community, engaging in the deep dialogue necessary for integrating general science with local knowledge, ethics, and politics; in the end, putting people “to work” to make real effective differences (485). And this is precisely what Hull House did so successfully. Addams’s descriptions of Hull House and its purpose give us the key ingredients for real work on wicked problems. She says the settlement was “an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city.” This experimental effort was inherently driven by the voices of their neighbors with the goal of creating a “chorus” out of “isolated voices,” and thus giving them “volume and strength” (“Subjective Necessity” 25). In fact, what Hull House did so much better than do many current institutions was to link values and knowledge to action in an inclusive manner.¹¹

Current advocacy efforts for boundary organizations come out of an understanding that boundary work bridges the gap between science and policy, between knowledge and its use. Instead of defining these collaborative efforts as dangerous, as a blurring of boundaries, such efforts are understood as helping to form vital connections for ameliorative action (Guston 399). In fact, boundary organizations tend to operate as flexible, yet stabilizing forces that bridge the gap between our various institutions, between theory and application, science and policy, the experts and the people. Along these lines, Addams said those who work through Hull House must strive to use their knowledge and “influence to secure” legislation (“Subjective Necessity” 26). “Viewed this way,” we can reappropriate Addams’s work, understanding it as “a new field

of research and application that integrated different forms of knowledge production, observation or implementation” (“Democracy and Social” 91-92). Wicked problem scholars today, like Frank Fischer, unknowingly harken back to the work of the settlement.¹²

David H. Guston drives this argument home by arguing that boundary organizations consistently address real problems. They do so by living up to three separate criteria: 1) by providing the space, “the opportunity” and often necessary “incentives” for the work to be done, (2) by engaging stakeholders from various sides of the issue and employing moderators or facilitators in doing so, and 3) by existing “at the frontier of the two relatively different social worlds of politics and science” (401). As we’ve seen, Hull House intentionally worked to share in the life of its neighbors and thus to better see and understand that life. In “The Objective Necessity for Social Settlements” Addams describes Hull House as performing four essential activities: social, educational, humanitarian and civic.¹³ In explicating these roles, she quickly illustrates how the settlement fulfilled Guston’s above criteria. Various reports indicate that between one and seven thousand people visited Hull House each week for a wide-range of reasons (Elshtain 44). At various points in its history, over thirty-five classes were being offered a week (“Subjective Necessity” 26). Hull House also had a dedicated reading room, collaborating with Chicago library to provide neighborhood residents with magazines, newspapers, and books.¹⁴

In the end, boundary organizations can, “by combining tacit and explicit knowledge...co-create new, transformational knowledge and shared understanding which may be critical to innovation in the policy process” (Batie 1183). In working between and amongst various forces, the “successful” boundary organization provides a relatively *stable* balancing point for stakeholders.¹⁵ Guston says “boundary organizations suggest that the old idea that politics and

science should be neatly cleaved should be abandoned in favor of the newer attempt to mix the interests of both” (403). Yet the attempt to “mix the interests of both” is not so new. Addams’s life work at Hull House is an exemplary counter-example to the problematic drive to keep the two separate. Unfortunately, more integrated approaches were and often still are criticized as unscientific or biased and thus as unreliable and dangerous.

Addams, the Facilitator

Key to the literature of wicked problems is the idea that meliorating our most troubling communal problems requires “bottom up (participatory) tactics and interdisciplinary collaboration” (Thompson and Whyte 2). This framework is precisely the one employed by Addams, and it created opportunities for systemic and procedural changes. For instance, Elshtain tells her reader “nearly every piece of major reform in the years from 1895-1930 comes with Jane Addams’s name attached in one way or another” (xxv). The traditional scholarly pursuit rarely yields such systemic and transformative outcomes. Putting it lightly, WP scholars Paul Thompson and Kyle Whyte say this traditional “model of persuading a judge or administrator about a well-defined decision *may not* be helpful” (12, *emphasis mine*). In truth, the problems with this isolating, specialized, and purely rational model has *long* been recognized by feminist pragmatists. Addams’s collaborative efforts to address wicked problems required immense flexibility; and this flexibility led Addams to develop the skill sets our WP scholars promote as essential to the work ahead: a capable organizer, a fair facilitator and negotiator, a public and engaged scholar, a critical interpreter, and a tireless fund-raiser (among other essential skills). In place of rewarding the hyper-specialization of scholarship today (and the resulting isolation), WP scholars suggest experts pay attention to the public discourse and thus guide their work towards issues that really matter.

Working in this capacity, Yun Lee reappropriates Addams's work on peace and food justice for the problems we confront today. She argues Addams's work "at Hull-House around food can inform, educate, and expand the horizon of our imaginations on critical contemporary issues of social justice" (62). For instance, through her extensive work on food justice and peace Addams came to recognize the inherent wickedness of many of our social problems, acknowledging that the "collective, political struggle...crossed gender, class, and national boundaries" (63). Food at Hull House became a means by which to gather with diverse neighbors, come to better understand differences and thus begin to bridge these divisions; it was a consistent and deliberate opening for fellowship and thus collaboration.

In line with Addams's work to facilitate cooperative action was her work as a critical interpreter. Marilyn Fischer brings our attention to Addams's consistent use of interpretation, especially as a means of resisting initial public polarizations. For example, replacing "fear" and "hostility" with interpretation has the power to open us to our initial mistaken assumptions (485). As an interpreter embedded in her community, Addams clearly often faced "obligations to act" in "morally ambiguous" circumstances ("Interpretation's," 489). For instance, Addams notes that "the underdog" is not in fact "always right," but often at least partially wrong ("The Chicago Settlements," 166). On top of this and in line with her pragmatism, interpretation is not understood as a neutral task; instead, Fischer describes Addams's interpretative work as "mediation-advocacy" not least because she recognized long ago that we must often "choose in the face of uneliminable risk and uncertainty" ("Interpretation's," 490). Such interpretative work, meant to engage the community it interprets, opens opportunities for "reconstruction" ("Interpretation's," 494). She says, "life... teaches us nothing more inevitable than that right and wrong are most confusedly mixed... that right does not dazzle our eyes with its radiant shining,

but has to be found by exerting patience, discrimination, and impartiality” (“The Settlement as a Factor,” 57). Much of Addams’s work thus redefines the relationship between the public and the expert; re-envisioning this relationship is a key theme in the literature on wicked problems and participatory democracy.

Addams is, in effect, an exemplary example of engaged philosophy. Addams’s engaged methodology, by facilitating dialogue and working in collaboration with various others to restructure inequities and shift imbalances of power, can be upheld as a model for feminist scholars and activists today.¹⁶ Addams advises us to “move with the people” (“Democracy and Social” 69). This provides one with the opportunity to first “discover what people really want” and “move along with those whom he leads toward a goal that neither he nor they see very clearly till they come to it” (“Democracy and Social” 69). Here Addams highlights both how our conception of the problem comes about *through* collaborative inquiry and how genuine creativity can be generated from an open and collaborative process. She is calling for what Turnpenny labels “consensual wisdom.” Consensual wisdom requires transparency and participation, but also a more careful and cooperative process of issue framing.

Limitations

Given a vastly changed world from the one in which Addams resided, we may be concerned that more work in revisiting parts of her philosophy needs to be done.¹⁷ However, the complex social issues Addams confronted are not far removed from the issues we face today.¹⁸ And in any case, specific strategies deployed in response to wicked problems are not supposed to be fully replicable. Part of what makes a problem wicked is its very unique and high stakes circumstances, with conditions that make it resistant to resolution based on the precise strategies applied to some similar problem. Thus, it should not be very troubling to reference

Addams's work from a time past, especially given how the general methodologies she employed align with and extend the methodologies recommended by current WP scholars.

Still, translating Addams's work into such a large and complex scale – across great distances and spans of time as well as within different mediums with technology – is a challenge. “Re-Thinking Soup,” an initiative started in 2008 by the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (JAHHM), was designed and implemented to do just this work: to re-examine Hull House's efforts in relation to food justice and to cultivate what was still of value in these efforts for our times. Based on Hull House's original Kitchen and Coffee House, Re-Thinking Soup is a “collective dining experience” and “democratic forum” focused on exploring food justice issues (Yun Lee 66). Essential to such work was Addams's own acknowledgement that our most successful endeavors must be ones created and engaged cooperatively. Cooperative inquiry, as framed within a feminist pragmatic framework, can be a means towards radical institutional change. The list of reforms Addams helped to make possible proves these methods to be quite effective. It is the beginning of sympathetic understanding, a moving beyond one's own narrow interests.

Conclusion

While the scholarship on wicked problems may be new to most philosophical disciplines, its methodology can be traced back to Addams's work at Hull House, with its local roots and global reach. The writings of Jane Addams demonstrate not simply a recognition of communal problems we would now categorize as wicked, but they also provide the reader with insights into *how* we should go about addressing such tricky and malicious communal problems. Addams's focus on the importance of perplexity, of genuine cooperation, and the need to expand our

loyalties gives us strategies for moving forward in a political, socio-economic, medical and environmental climate rampant with wicked problems.

Her work can be read fruitfully as a series of case studies illuminating various strategies for addressing wicked problems, strategies often left either undeveloped or underdeveloped in the WP literature. Her on-the-ground collaboration provides us with more guiding insights. For one, Addams calls on us to more consciously develop “fellowship.” She does so in part by focusing on the need for sympathetic understanding, a getting-beyond-oneself. It requires not the simple tolerating of difference, but instead a deeper commitment to difference and reciprocity. In addition, the development of Hull House and its many endeavors serve as a seminal study of what boundary organizations – bridge institutions – can do. Our collective moving away from such organizations and increasing isolation has not led to promising outcomes. The current focus on community engagement activities within many institutions of higher education can be seen as a drive to return to such work.

Addams, as a public philosopher, also reminds us of a need for intimate on-the-ground engagement efforts. She operated as a key facilitator in a long list of social movements and policy reforms. As such, she was driven to argue for the power found in operating *with* others in place of *for* or *on* them. Seigfried, like Elshtain, tells us Addams is primarily understood as a sociologist or activist. We know she was far more than this. “She is,” Seigfried says, “an exemplary case of how pragmatism, like feminism, internally disrupts artificial and counterproductive disciplinary boundaries” (45). She is also, in truth, an “exemplary case” of how we should be attempting to tackle the wicked problems we face today. What makes Addams’s work so relevant to our wicked problems today was her strong commitment to making

the world better through a more robust methodology whose test is always in answering the question – asked of everyone involved – “does this *really* work?”

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Notes

1. In the Feminist Pragmatist tradition, knowledge is co-constructed in a particular context and social milieu; it is understood as a tool for meliorating our most pressing problems; values are those which serve us, solve our problems, and are, thus, deemed worthy of holding on to; truth is fallible and contingent, always subject to change (Seigfried 7).

2. As an example, she cites initial efforts to introduce “health foods” in Hull House’s Diet Kitchens because it was disconnected from residents’ eating habits, cultures and desires, as a resounding failure. This failure was, however, a source of instruction for Addams and Hull House residents, leading them to engage from the beginning with their various stakeholders, reshaping their methodology. This is precisely what WP scholars recommend we do: collaboratively pursue an iterative process of reflective engagement.
3. In another illustration, Addams highlights the possibilities of expansion by referencing the collaborative efforts engaged after the initial downfall of Chicago’s unionized and highly trained Russian-Jewish cloakmakers by untrained American-Irish young women willing to work for far less wages. She tells her reader, “these two sets of people were held together only by the pressure upon their trade. They were separated by strong racial differences, by language, by nationality, by religion, by mode of life, by every possible social distinction” (“Settlement as a Factor” 51). On top of these divisions also lay the opposing commitments to individualism and socialism. When Addams provides them with a space to meet, she describes the interpreter – and in no small measure Hull House itself – as standing *helplessly* between the two.
4. In general, feminist pragmatists consistently argue it is far more valuable for us to gather our facts cooperatively. When we separately gather our facts, “there is a tendency for each to stick rigidly to its own particular facts” (Follett 15). When facts are gathered cooperatively they can be used in “conference,” instead of being used to “bolster up partisanship” (16). These concerns highlight the need for stakeholder involvement *from the beginning*.

5. Large gifts to the community tend to obscure the matter further, making it difficult for the community to see and honestly assess earlier “wrongs committed against it” (72).
6. It is not that individual experimentation is bad, but rather that it cannot be understood as the end-goal. Addams does argue that experimental actions, “... undertaken with vigor and boldness” are necessary; they are simply not sufficient (“Democracy and Social” 73). She further notes such actions have “didactic value in failure as well as in success” (“Democracy and Social” 73-4), highlighting another key theme from the WP scholarship: wicked problems require action if only so we can learn from our mistakes and begin to make progress.
7. In line with Jones and Hamington, Marilyn Fischer drives the point home, saying Addams “found herself caught up in her neighbors’ worlds, sharing their cares and joys, desires and frustrations, needs and generousities. From such neighborly fellowship, personalities were transformed, and joint activity was a natural outgrowth” (492).
8. Norton’s WP scholarship, for instance, focuses more on conceptual and definitional barriers to collaboration than on sympathetic understanding. Sarewitz and Turnpenny et al., in arguing that we need to work more on understanding our diverse and conflicting values, point to – but do not elaborate on – the need for Addams’s sympathetic understanding. Others more generally point to a problem of plural and conflicting values. But none go far enough in explicating what Addams sees as an essential feature of successful collaboration under complex and wicked conditions.
9. Indeed, Elshtain characterizes Hull House as “the living embodiment of Jane Addams’s social philosophy” (xxxiv).

10. On top of the problems caused by the divide between those who do the science and those who use it, we also face intense pressure from a heavy focus on knowledge-ownership as a primary means of profit-production. This additional layer adds yet another dimension of complexity that must be confronted. Frank Fischer, extending the work of Dewey in arguing for an engaged public, reminds us that we are today often “socialized into the role of consumer rather than citizen.” We also tend to heavily mix “the selling of products with the task of informing the populace” (35, 36). Fischer concludes that this “standard practitioner-client model must give way to a more democratic relationship” (39-40).
11. Another institution pointed to today as a possible effective boundary between policy and science – the university – often instead looks like and operates along the lines of a compound, more effectively keeping people out, rather than inviting them in. To the extent that the university fails to begin in and with the community, it also gets it wrong. Addams consistently urged that successful social experiments needed to have their beginning with the community members intimately involved in the issue.
12. Frank Fischer, for instance, concludes we really require localized resistance and local knowledge in tackling wicked problems (27). The work of the boundary organization is primed to do just this.
13. The reader should note Addams also says these descriptions are inherently artificial and partial, limited guides only useful in helping the reader to better understand the complex roles Hull House played (“Objective Value” 44).
14. Responding to the needs of the surrounding community, Hull House even had public bathrooms, a nursery, and kindergarten.

15. Guston references the Office of Technology Assessment as a fairly successful boundary organization because it “internalized partisan differences, negotiated them for each study, and produced in its studies... a standardized package that either party (or any of several congressional committees) could use for its own purposes” (403).
16. Power is here best understood as a *relation*; we are working to develop “power-with” others in place of a “power-over” others (Follett). In my analysis, the WP literature certainly engages issues of power, but does not often dig deeply into the issue. In contrast, Addams very much worked within “asymmetrical power relations” where attempts towards neutrality would result in continued power imbalances. Thus, Addams interpretative work “included advocacy for the less powerful” (Fischer 489). Because Addams more consistently confronted such problems on-the-ground and because feminist pragmatism today works more rigorously on problems of power than does a classical pragmatism or WP scholarship, it has a more serious grasp on problems of power and is thus another vital addition to the scholarship.
17. See *Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism* (2012), ed. Maurice Hamington and Celia Bardwell-Jones.
18. For example, we still confront a range of “opportunities and challenges to democracy that a growing immigration population represents, economic instability that makes the unsustainable aspects of the capitalist project even more obvious, and a passion for progressive change alongside anxiety about global security” (Yun Lee 75).