



# COGNITIO

Revista de Filosofia  
Centro de Estudos de Pragmatismo

São Paulo, v. 25, n. 1, p. 1-6, jan.-dez. 2024  
e-ISSN: 2316-5278

 <https://doi.org/10.23925/2316-5278.2024v25i1:e65465>

## BOOK REVIEW | RESENHA

### SANTARELLI, M. *La filosofia sociale del pragmatismo: un'introduzione*. Bologna: Biblioteca Club, 2021.

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Undoubtedly, American Pragmatism has a special interest in practical philosophy. A quick review of the work of classical pragmatists such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Jane Addams, John Dewey or Clarence Irving Lewis, or contemporary ones such as Richard Rorty or Hilary Putnam, is enough to observe how theoretical approaches, i.e. metaphysics or epistemology, fruitfully converge in practical approaches, i.e., ethics, political, and social philosophy. Even though there are many studies about pragmatism and ethics or politics, this is not the case with social philosophy. Within this general framework, in his book *La filosofia sociale del pragmatismo: un'introduzione* the Italian researcher Matteo Santarelli aims to fill this gap by providing as unified view as possible of the social philosophy of pragmatism.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of these pages is to present an overview of Santarelli's work by addressing the main topics of each chapter and to offer some comments about the book. In general terms, the relevance of this work is due to two crucial aspects: firstly, Santarelli analyses different sources in view of (re)constructing a pragmatist account on social philosophy. This is an innovative approach because, as above-mentioned, it focuses on a field that has not received much attention from scholars on pragmatism, but also because it focuses on a tradition that has not received much attention from scholar on social philosophy. Secondly, Santarelli organises the material in a very interesting way. Rather than concentrating on different authors, which would make the volume a series of perspectives in a quite basic format, each of the six chapters addresses a conceptual pair – generally presented as a dichotomy by the Western philosophical tradition – and shows how pragmatist philosophers have tried to overcome it. In this vein, each chapter starts from the general epistemological framework and ends in detailed discussions. As a result, the approach is a nice combination between a problematic and a historical perspective. Another thing to note is that the writing is very friendly, nourished by well thought out and developed examples that allow the reader to move towards more

Recebido em: 06/02/2024.

Aprovado em: 07/03/2024.

Publicado em: 21/05/2024.



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<sup>1</sup> Matteo Santarelli is Junior Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Communication at the University of Bologna. He completed a PhD. at University of Roma Tre in 2014 and at University of Molise in 2018. His research interests lie mainly in moral philosophy, ethics, social philosophy, and social sciences. He has published several essays and articles on classical pragmatism, especially John Dewey and George Herbert Mead.

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specific considerations, without getting lost in technicalities. Thus, even though it presupposes some previous knowledge of the general theses of pragmatism, the text introduces the reader to a specific field of research and develops in an increasing degree of theoretical complexity. Lastly, each chapter has a final section of annotated bibliographical references for further discussion, which includes not only the sources but also secondary literature to complement the reading.

The Introduction to the book presents some basic guidelines for the whole inquiry. Firstly, Santarelli recovers Chauncey Wright and Peirce to establish three central features of pragmatism: fallibilism, experimentalism and the critique of dichotomies. Secondly, he restores the “double” historical source of pragmatist social philosophy, namely the critical reception of Georg W. F. Hegel’s and the liberal thought of Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill. Within this context, the author argues that pragmatists like Peirce or Dewey rework the analysis of possible consequences of concepts or actions because they take them as a starting point for reflexive evaluation – an indispensable constituent of this kind of social philosophy. Thirdly, Santarelli establishes a chronological-thematic criterion for the selection of sources, so as to explain why he includes authors not usually recognised in the pragmatist canon, such as Mary Parker Follett or William E. B. Du Bois, and also why he excludes authors such as Peirce, a founder of pragmatism but almost with no works on social issues. All in all, Santarelli gives Dewey a central role in his argument, for Deweyan thought represents the broadest attempt to advance towards a pragmatist social philosophy, defined as an experimental philosophy constituted in view of the reflexive evaluation of social phenomena.

Chapter 1 deals with the pair Facts / Values. Indeed, a fundamental feature of pragmatism is the thesis about the entanglement of facts and values, given that the knowledge of facts is value-driven and that values are not just subjective preferences but are related to the facts that we define as meaningful.<sup>2</sup> Within this framework, critical of the so-called “Hume’s fork” and of ethical emotivism, Santarelli offers a reading of Dewey’s theory of valuation and of the contemporary re-readings of Putnam and Joas. In this vein, the author points out that the critique of pragmatism does not imply denying the distinction between facts and values *in toto*, but rather problematising its dichotomous understanding, and that from the pragmatist point of view, evaluation implies not the application of a pre-established value to a situation but rather a redefinition and rearticulation of the values involved. From this standpoint, Santarelli claims that changes in values imply changes in concepts and because of that the pair Concept/Conceptualisation plays a central role in a pragmatist social philosophy.

In chapter 2, which deals with the pair Concept/Non-concept, Santarelli starts from Durkheim’s critique of pragmatism, in general, and of James, in particular, according to which the latter would deny even a minimal level of determination of the real and therefore would open the doors to irrationalism. This approach is an opening for a detailed analysis of James’s position on the classic philosophical problem of the link between thought and the real. The hypothesis explored by Santarelli is that in James two ways of interpreting the relationship between thought and the real coexist: (i) the translation of the flow of experience into conceptual language, with all the philosophical problems that this entails (as the Italian saying goes, “*traduttore, traditore*”), and (ii) the articulation of partially indeterminate aspects of the real, which implies at the same time a rearticulation of the content of the concept itself. From here, Santarelli argues that the idea of articulation is central to a pragmatist social philosophy. He draws on two set of sources that have analysed the issue: Parker Follet and Rorty, who advance the thesis that conceptualisation and reality are mutually articulated and shaped; and Dewey, who claims

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2 Even though this point is beyond the scope of the book, it is of the most importance because it allows for addressing the contemporary discussion about the *value-free science ideal* in order to argue that science is not value free insofar as it seems not possible to split facts from values, on the one hand, and as it seems not possible to make a-valuational decisions within the inquiry and/or when it is time to consider the potential consequences of inductive risk. There are many references on this ongoing discussion, from different philosophical perspectives. However, Lacey (1999) and Douglas (2009) are essential readings, while Brown (2020) elaborates a theoretical framework to address the discussion based on classical pragmatism.

that a good practical judgement is one that allows the initially indeterminate situation to be adequately articulated, often through a process of politicisation, and which can result in conceptual readjustment. This is especially relevant for concepts of the political tradition and, therefore, for the project of a pragmatist social philosophy.

In the following chapter, Santarelli addresses the important pair Individual/Social. The author reconstructs George H. Mead's definition of the self in terms of the reflexive relationship we have with ourselves, only possible through the internalisation of a principle of organisation of social responses. The main interpretative hypothesis is that socialisation does not consist in a process of construction on a biological *tabula rasa* but rather in the reorganisation of relations and practices that are already socio-biological. In this framework, Santarelli reviews Mead's theory of meaning, from which he underlines the fact that the term "social" implies reciprocity between interaction and organisation, and concentrates on two central axes of Mead's position: (i) the link between the process of socialisation and the simultaneous process of individuation, and (ii) the notion of perspective, according to which in human behaviour the individual can enter into the perspective of the people around him due to meaningful communication. As Santarelli notes at the end of the chapter, this reformulation of the Individual / Social dichotomy is a starting point for contemporary conceptualisations such as Joas' (1985), who takes intersubjective relations to be a constituent of personal identity.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the pair Reason/Feeling. Santarelli argues that pragmatism has developed an original understanding of the affective sphere of human experience. The author recovers, firstly, Dewey's 1894-1895 essays on James's theory of emotions, highlighting the Deweyan idea that emotions are part of a broader coordination between organism and environment. Secondly, Santarelli recovers Dewey's concept of interest and emphasises its role in the pattern or matrix of inquiry, in particular with regard to the phase of setting the problem to be inquired into (Dewey, 1986, p. 105-122).<sup>3</sup> These elements function as a hinge in the chapter, for they help to explain how pragmatism overcomes the Reason/Feeling dichotomy by showing that research processes are structured by the affectivity that marks the link between organism and environment. The concepts of emotion and interest also lead to the analysis of Dewey's most significant contribution to a pragmatist social philosophy: the notion of public. Indeed, the affective dimension plays a fundamental role in the constitution of the public, since it is a group of people who recognise itself as affected by the indirect consequences of certain actions and it is interested in regulating them. Thus, the articulation of the public's interest implies the shaping of its identity as such. However, the articulation of interests must be followed by research aimed at solving the common problem, which requires cooperation and feedback between scientific knowledge and the public. In this order, then, the overcoming of the Reason/Feeling dichotomy is fundamental to understand the idea of research in general, and of social and political research in particular – neither of which could be fully understood without considering its affective dimension.

The last two chapters are devoted to the more reconstructive aspect of the pragmatist perspective on social philosophy. Thus, in chapter 5, Santarelli shows how classical pragmatists deal with the pair Habit/Intelligence. Taking into account the central role of habits in our actions, Santarelli examines how pragmatists emphasise the importance of the pre-reflective dimension of behaviour without denying the importance of intelligence. Based on this observation, the author explores Dewey's notion of habitus, defined as a modality of relationship between the individual and the environment, that is, a general disposition to act that in specific situations is articulated in an explicit mode of action. It is particularly interesting Santarelli's hypothesis that Dewey offers a sort of synthesis of Peirce's and James' positions on the subject. The encounter between habit and intelligence, Santarelli argues, occurs when the coordination between organism and environment breaks down, and reflexive intelligence intervenes

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3 Santarelli offers a detailed analysis of Dewey's concept of interest from various points of view: educative, psychological, social, and political, in his previous book *La vita interessata: una proposta teorica a partire da John Dewey* (Santarelli, 2019).

in order to achieve a reconstruction of the habit. However, this seems to presuppose that intelligence is always capable of modifying our habits, in what would be an extremely naïve version of the matter that leaves aside two fundamental issues: the non-conscious character of habits and their inertial force. On the first point, in order to make the reading more complex and to defend the Deweyan position, Santarelli makes a bold move and resorts to the Freudian distinction between preconscious and unconscious. The author claims that, from the perspective of the pragmatism of Peirce, James and Dewey, the unreflective character of habits could be described as preconscious – that which is not a direct or explicit object of consciousness, but which can become such without too much effort. Nevertheless, Santarelli deepens the analysis of the (problematic, it must be said) link between pragmatism and psychoanalysis and identifies some very interesting passages in which there are certain conceptual parallels with the notion of the unconscious. The second point, the inertia of habits, explains the consequences of habits at social and political level, which often plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of power relations. According to Santarelli, Dewey acknowledges the conservative aspect of certain habits, even though they initially had emancipatory potential. However, such inertial character does not impede the intervention of intelligence towards a reconstruction of habits, a crucial step in the dynamics of social and political conflict.

These considerations open the way to chapter 6, which concentrates on the pair Conflict/Integration. The author's first step is to situate the birth of pragmatism in the context of racial, labour, and gender conflicts in the United States in order to point out how, in the very origin of this current of thought, a central place had already been assigned to this type of reflections – such is the case of Du Bois, Dewey, and Addams. From here, Santarelli offers a reconstruction of two particularly complex pragmatist approaches to social conflict, that of Parker Follet and of Dewey. With respect to Parker Follet, Santarelli recovers her distinction between domination, compromise or negotiation, and integration when analysing social conflicts. If domination implies the imposition of one part, and negotiation implies the renunciation of (at least some of) the interests of each part, then at the social political level the conflict could only be resolved either by denial of the other or by mutual limitation. However, there is a third possibility, given by integration: the interests of the parties are rearticulated in a new shared interest that emerges in the development of the relationship. With respect to Dewey, Santarelli highlights his references to social groups and the interaction of their interests, whether in cooperative terms, when constituting a democracy, or in conflicting terms, given the dynamic of imposition of the interests of a certain social group and the suppression of the other interests, by subtle means of hegemony. He also focuses on the possibilities of emancipation and the articulation of common interests, without which democracy in the Deweyan sense of a way of life or “conjoint communicated experience” would not be possible (Dewey, 1980, p. 93). It is precisely here that several of the criticisms of Dewey fall. Indeed, Santarelli reviews three of them: Charles Wright Mills' criticisms, classical Marxism's criticisms, and Leon Trotsky's criticisms – with whom Dewey had an interesting exchange on the relationship between means and ends, after his participation in the “trial” of Trotsky in Mexico. Beyond these specific considerations, Santarelli underlines two relevant aspects for a pragmatist social philosophy: it considers the dimension of conflict in society, and it offers elements to evaluate existing power relations in the light of normative criteria.

The book also presents a Conclusion section, where Santarelli identifies the main points shared by the different pragmatist perspectives in social philosophy: the anti-dichotomic approach to the relevant conceptual pairs, the necessary interaction between theory and practice, and the integration between the descriptive and normative planes. This very last feature leads Santarelli to some final remarks on the central role of democracy, which is at the core of the pragmatist social philosophy. The main interest, ultimately, is to emphasise that pragmatism offers a perspective on social philosophy that should not be understood as opposed to the critical tradition or to the liberal tradition, but rather as part of a dialogue between them and among classical areas such as political philosophy and ethics – or as an area whose boundaries are flexible and contingent.

All things considered, *La filosofia sociale del pragmatismo. Un'introduzione* is an exhaustive study in which a clear style of writing works together with a detailed analysis of philosophical positions under well-established theses. It certainly achieves its aim of reconstructing a pragmatist view on social philosophy without letting the differences pass and without avoiding theoretical criticisms and problems. In addition, it sets some lines of inquiry to further develop by the author himself or by other scholars, regarding both the epistemic and the normative dimension of social philosophy. Besides that, in the light of the socio-political context of Western societies and the rising of right-wing movements in several countries, the general argument of the book motivates some important questions: is it possible to integrate or articulate their interests with democratic social group's interests or should democracy draw a line to exclude them? Does pragmatism offer any theoretical tool to deal with social groups standing on the border or even outside democracy? In this sense, the book is a highly stimulating invitation to keep working towards a comprehensive pragmatist social philosophy and to address very pressing current questions.

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