

"I AM AN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER"



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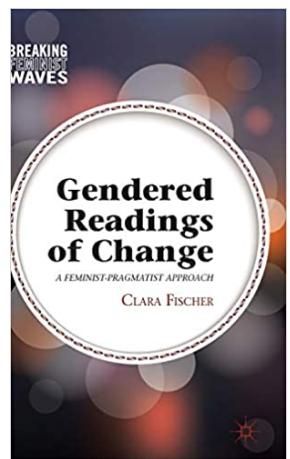
What does American philosophy mean to you?

This question and the title of this interview series are somewhat complex in my case, as I am not American, nor am I 'solely' a philosopher. I grew up across two European countries, completed my postgraduate studies in Ireland, and have since worked in Britain, Ireland, and Northern Ireland. My work is interdisciplinary, spanning philosophy, politics, and gender studies, and draws on a range of philosophical frameworks and schools of thought.

With that said, a lot of my work relies on American philosophy, especially on the classical pragmatist thought of John Dewey and Jane Addams, and on contemporary feminist-pragmatist work. I find pragmatism appealing as it is so conducive to feminist theory and action, as pragmatism as a "lived philosophy" reflects the politically rich lives of the classical pragmatists, while at the same time providing the philosophical tools with which to bridge theory and action.

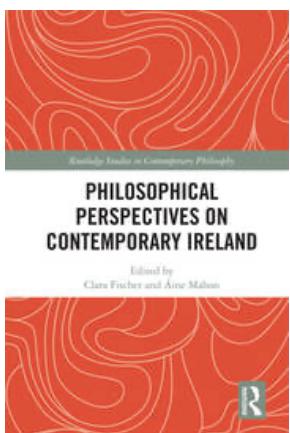
How did you become an American philosopher?

I actually came to pragmatism via feminist theory, specifically via Charlene Haddock Seigfried's work. She presented pragmatism as an alternative, or "third way" of doing feminist work that seemed to overcome some of the impasses prevalent in feminist theory at the time, including epistemological and metaphysical problems with distinct political implications. For example, the critique of 'the Subject' or 'the Truth' (with capital letters in both cases) made by poststructural/postmodern feminist theorists, while valid and important in its own right, seemed to erase these philosophical categories entirely. Seigfried, and a number of feminist-pragmatist thinkers, however, pointed to pragmatism as a resource for addressing these problems in what seemed, to me, to be a more nuanced manner, drawing on pragmatism's fallibilist epistemology and its theorisation of the subject in constant adaptive relation with its environment.



How would you describe your current research?

My current research focuses on the political significance of affect, emotion, and embodiment. There has long been a feminist interest in these categories, however, this has recently been reinvigorated with a contemporary "turn to affect" and "new materialism" in critical theory across the disciplines. My work engages with such current trends in critical thought, while bringing a distinctly pragmatist flavour to these debates. To that end, I've drawn on Dewey, James, and Addams to examine how their bodies of work might contribute to contemporary discussions on affect, emotion, and embodiment and what role these categories might play in post-linguistic turn theorising.



I also interrogate different political problems and social contexts, including the problematic construction of women and children in post-colonial Ireland that has resulted, over the decades, in a host of gendered injustices and violences, including mass-institutionalisation, the denial of reproductive rights, and the circumscription of women's freedom of movement. More recently, I've traced such injustices to single mothers' experiences in Ireland, including during the 2008 crisis and latterly, during the current crisis precipitated by Covid-19.

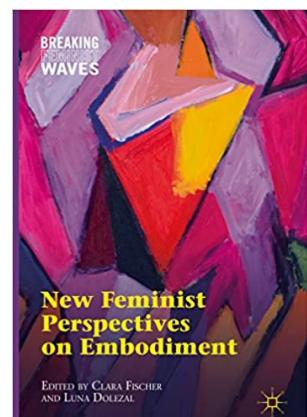
What do you do when you aren't doing American philosophy?

I usually find myself running after a very busy toddler. It turns out that 2 year olds don't have an off-button! So when not working, I'm engrossed with all the joys and challenges parenthood brings. In a world before her, I had time to read fiction and play the piano. These days I'm lucky if I can get the occasional tinkle in before being treated to a hammering piano "recital" by my daughter. I reckon it's a fair trade-off though!

What is your favorite work in American philosophy? What should we all be reading?

This is a difficult question, as it keeps changing! However, I'm currently preoccupied by the classical pragmatists' work on emotion. I think this work is hugely underrated and underutilised by contemporary theorists. In fact, there are very few in-depth analyses in this area, particularly of Dewey's and Addams's work. Given the contemporary trends in critical theory already mentioned above, I think this is a shame, as the classical pragmatists definitely have something to offer to critical thinkers of the present moment.

Moreover, the particular social and political challenges we are currently living with need to be approached within the frame of affect and



emotion, as the mobilisation and manipulation of particular emotions has fueled divisions and the (continued) marginalisation of certain social groups. Pragmatist work can be drawn on to develop sophisticated theorisations of the politics of emotion that can help us redress such social and political problems with a view to doing what pragmatism does best – bridging theory and action in the service of meliorism.