Clara Fischer is an EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Centre for Gender, Feminisms, and Sexualities, and Co-director of the Dewey Studies Research Centre at University College Dublin. She is the author of *Gendered Readings of Change: A Feminist-Pragmatist Approach* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), and co-editor of *Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future* (Arlen House/Syracuse University Press, 2015), *New Feminist Perspectives on Embodiment* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), and *Philosophical Perspectives on Contemporary Ireland* (Routledge, 2019). She has published widely on feminist-pragmatism, Irish feminisms, reproduction and sexuality in Ireland, gender and nationalism, institutionalisation and containment, and shame, emotion, and embodiment, and has recently published a special issue of *Hypatia* on "Gender and the Politics of Shame" (2018), and of *Contemporary Pragmatism* on “John Dewey and Critical Philosophies for Critical Political Times” (2019).

Jessica A. Heybach is an associate professor of education at Aurora University. Heybach’s scholarly interests lie at the intersection of curriculum theory, philosophy of education and critical aesthetic pedagogy.
Q (Heybach): How did you come to study philosophy and became attracted to Dewey’s work/thought?

A (Fischer): I developed an interest in philosophy while still at school, being generally interested in the big 'why' questions. At university, I chose an Arts degree, that is, an undergraduate degree course that allows you to pick three subjects in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and philosophy was one of those subjects. My encounter with pragmatism and Dewey’s work came much later, though. I’d already completed two Masters degrees and was doing a Ph.D. in feminism, when I came across Charlene Seigfried’s work.¹ Seigfried presented pragmatism as a third alternative to the analytic/continental traditions in philosophy, and as a framework that could provide answers to certain impasses in feminist theory at the time, such as between a too rigid, biological essentialism v. a too fluid postmodern constructionism. I subsequently developed a deep interest in feminist-pragmatism, and in the classical pragmatists, especially John Dewey’s work. This was always driven, though, with a view to addressing contemporary, political problems and feminist debates. My Ph.D. and the book that arose from it, Gendered Readings of Change: A Feminist-Pragmatist Approach,² drew on Dewey’s, Addams’s, and contemporary pragmatist work to examine some of the feminist theoretical impasses already mentioned, specifically as these related to questions of change. Perhaps unusually, my route into pragmatism thus came from feminist theory, and Seigfried’s work in particular.

Q: What other intellectual figures influenced your thinking on Contemporary Pragmatism?

I read a lot of feminist-pragmatist work, including, of course Seigfried's, but also Shannon Sullivan's, Marilyn Fischer's, Erin McKenna's, Lisa Heldke's, and Maurice Hamington's, and also frequently delve into the classical pragmatist women and feminist thinkers, such as Jane Addams and Jesse Taft. I've always found Dewey to be the most "feminist-friendly" male, classical pragmatist thinker, and so have maintained a strong interest in Dewey's work over the years, and in theorists who use his philosophy to address contemporary social, political, and ethical problems, such as Judith Greene and Gregory Fernando Pappas. More recently, I've also been very engaged with William James's thought, particularly on emotion, and in conversation with Dewey's work, as this relates to current developments in feminist theory.

Q: Describe your current work on feminist pragmatism. What aspects of this work do you think all pragmatists should be paying attention to?

My current work in feminist-pragmatism is in the broad area of emotion and embodiment in the context of emerging feminist theories. There is a long tradition, in feminist thought, of looking

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at the social, political, and moral import of emotions and embodiment. More recently, however, a number of theorists in a variety of fields have coined the “affect theory” and “new materialism” paradigms, which explicitly claim affects and embodiment, respectively, as cornerstones of a new way of doing theory. These recent trajectories in feminist thought often position themselves in opposition to poststructuralism and the linguistic turn, and form what I call a “new school” of feminist thought that seeks to redress what is viewed as a maligning of emotion and embodiment. While much of this work is very interesting and original, I have developed some critiques that highlight a continuity rather than a rupture of feminist concern with emotion and embodiment, and have also brought affect theory and new materialism into conversation with pragmatism. With regard to the latter, John Dewey’s naturalist ontology and epistemology chimes well with new materialist work on the environment as agentic, while affect theory can speak to William James’s and Dewey’s respective models of emotion. Although I would like to refrain from imposing myself on “all pragmatists,” I do think that both pragmatists and feminists with an interest in critical thought can gain from examining these new theoretical developments in light of what pragmatism brings to the table in order to contribute to a broader interrogation of the linguistic turn and the status of critical theory today.

Q: Given this particular political-social moment, describe how current world affairs have influenced your work within feminism and pragmatism, and the questions you think philosophy should take up.

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My preoccupation with emotion and embodiment stems not just from the recent developments in critical thought already mentioned above, but is also prompted by current social and political events. I have written quite a bit about shame, in particular, and how this manifests itself through gender, but also through other intersecting structures, and in the context of specific policy failures and injustices. My focus here has largely been on Ireland, which has a rather dreary history of state and church-sponsored injustices committed against women and children – especially in relation to reproduction and the regulation of women’s bodies and sexuality. My work here has explored certain topics that have recently come to prominence, owing largely to advocacy and media work by women directly affected by these issues: the mass-institutionalisation of women throughout the 20th century, and Ireland’s abortion ban, which was overturned only last year, mainly owing to feminist activist efforts. More generally, I think that questions on the politics of emotion are vital for understanding contemporary political problems and for countering some of the more insidious and dangerous tendencies among self-interested, populist, right-wing movements. Sadly, we are increasingly witnessing a politics of fear, hatred and shame that inflames ill will, even violence, toward women, migrants, LGBT+ people, and a host of Others, who are dehumanised and degraded for political gain. Unless we examine how emotions, and the mobilisation of particular emotions against certain people, function in this context, we will not be able to develop social and political analyses that are sophisticated enough to deal with this right-

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wing onslaught and the threat it poses to all of us.

Q: What do you feel women (as well as gender non-conforming individuals) in philosophy should be working towards within the profession moving forward?

I’m loath to answer a question on what women should do. Sadly the issue of women in philosophy is sometimes mistakenly interpreted as a question about what women are doing ‘wrong’, rather than about the institutional and scholarly obstacles that women and gender non-conforming individuals, as well as minority academics more generally, sadly still face. So I think the question should be addressed to the profession and to institutions, rather than to women. With that in mind, it is obvious that there are still major problems and structural barriers facing women within philosophy, but also within academia more generally. It is true that there is a lot of advocacy work going on in that regard that is having a real impact – societies for women in philosophy, for example, being a great example of an initiative that has several benefits for women and the profession of philosophy, including raised profiles for women’s work, and opportunities for mentoring, networking, and support for younger women philosophers. However, institutionally, women continue to be disproportionately affected by the neoliberal university model, meaning that they are more likely to be in insecure employment and therefore vulnerable to exploitation and excluded from receiving benefits, even those that most immediately affect them, such as maternity leave provision. Unless women’s precarious status within universities is addressed – and that means hiring women on contracts that have a clear career path and provide job security within philosophy departments, as elsewhere – women and minority academics will continue to face structural barriers to research, teaching, and, ultimately their ability to lead healthy and fulfilled lives – and this is not just to their detriment, but also to the detriment of philosophy itself.
Q: What other questions/answers might be useful for our readers to consider about your work?

As a general comment, my passion for pragmatism developed out of feminist theoretical concerns and the need, as I still see it, to develop theory that can speak to and is informed by contemporary social and political problems. I’ve personally admired the activism of Dewey and Addams, in particular, and have thus felt drawn to pragmatism as a philosophy that can marry feminist action with critical thought. Pragmatism as a fundamentally lived philosophy is so appealing for those of us interested in achieving feminist ends, and I try, in my work, to apply and develop its lessons and insights to do just that. Given what I’ve said about the contemporary political moment we find ourselves in,\(^{10}\) I hope that I and other contemporary pragmatist thinkers can do justice to the strong scholarly and lived example set by several of the classical pragmatists who were themselves deeply committed to achieving progressive intellectual and socio-political goals.

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\(^{10}\) For a collection of articles on the importance of John Dewey’s work in the contemporary, political moment, see Clara Fischer and Conor Morris, eds., *John Dewey and Critical Philosophies for Critical Political Times (Special Issue), Contemporary Pragmatism*, Vol. 16, 2019.