

## “Jane Addams and her International Ethics of Social Radicalism: Global Justice as Realistic Utopia”

Pragmatism is a practical philosophy with human problems at its centre, problems that do not always stop at the borders of nation-states. Pragmatists were global activists as well as global thinkers. William James was Vice President of the New England Chapter of the Anti-Imperialist League and wrote seminal essays on the need to redirect the bellicosity found in human nature<sup>1</sup>. Dewey generated a considerable body of political journalism on international affairs<sup>2</sup> and was a high-profile member of many international organizations, but most active in the Outlawry of War Movement and was a founding member of its New York branch<sup>3</sup>. Jane Addams’s activism was unmatched among the pragmatists<sup>4</sup>. She is well known as the co-founder of Hull House, a settlement house for newly arrived European immigrants to Chicago, but less well known for her role as President of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom for 14 years, which worked to model at the global level an idea of democratic organization that was socially conceived.

To understand how moral ideas like global justice are generated within pragmatism, it is important to examine the activism of pragmatists and how its experimental method is put to use and practical judgments made. It follows that the life and work of Jane Addams, who held cosmopolitan ends in view, deserves closer attention. Arguably, there is no better hard case for the workings of pragmatist method than considering ethical possibility in the anarchic, international realm in which global justice is often seen as utopian fantasy. Addams articulates an idea of global justice that is expansive, yet seeks to meet the charge of utopian fantasy head on.

The article begins by comparing and contrasting global justice arrived at through pragmatist method

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<sup>1</sup> James (1904, 1910).

<sup>2</sup> Dewey (1929).

<sup>3</sup> Cochran (1999).

<sup>4</sup> Jane Addams won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

against one better known, that of John Rawls. Next the particular contribution that is Addams's actively relational and feminist approach to pragmatist method is explored. The ways in which Addams's thought was born out of the historical context of the Progressive era will be illuminated and a major difference from Dewey as to what practical judgment required in relation to a tragic problem of their day will be discussed.

## **1 Realistic Utopias**

International political thought is dominated by topics such as aggression, just war, self-determination and non-intervention. Ethics is at best an accommodation of interest within a community of states, the members of which have reciprocal rights to political sovereignty and territorial integrity. No utopia, but realistic. Rawls's aim in *The Law of Peoples* is, as he describes it, a realistic utopia. Realistic utopia also captures well Addams's and Dewey's view of international ethical possibility. For Rawls, Addams, and Dewey, justice is an important virtue of social institutions and the three believed that consideration of justice, which does not look beyond nation-states to the global, is wanting. While each held that thought about justice across the levels should have a logical consistency, they diverge in how they reach that logic. Addams and Dewey broadly share pragmatist method as Dewey describes it in his 1908 essay, "What Pragmatism Means by Practical", with its strong aversions to procedural and formal modes of thought. Whereas, Rawls's idea of international justice applies a conceptual distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory, formulating his "law of peoples" as a contractual arrangement under ideal conditions. Two rather different ideas of justice are the result, one a concept of international justice in which states are the subjects of justice (Rawls), the other is better described as a concept of global justice in which individuals are the ultimate subjects.

The shift Rawls makes from "societies" in *Theory of Justice* to "peoples" in *The Law of Peoples* assists in making a distinction important to his conception of international justice: that between rationality and reasonableness. The key to a well-ordered or just international society is that peoples or states are not governed by considerations of instrumental rationality alone and are motivated to act upon

reasonableness as well. The future goal that is the ideal component of Rawls's conception of international justice is that all are participant in a confederation of "decent" peoples. That is, they do not have to be *liberal* as such to be capable of holding common sympathies and acting in accordance with a moral nature. All that needs be demonstrated is the maintenance of a minimum standard of human rights and that aggression against other peoples is not engaged.

This second part of Rawls's ideal theory, the international component, is often charged with being too far apart from the real world to acknowledge the extent that worldly facts condition the goal within ideal theorizing. However, as John Simmons has written, the aim of ideal theory is "the most just institutional structure that can be achieved within the constraints set by the more or less intractable aspects of human nature and the nature of the world"<sup>5</sup>. For Rawls, the nature of the world is such that there are no guarantees of reasonableness, challenged as international society is by burdened societies and outlaw states, but neither is reasonableness unattainable for the future. What reasonableness can achieve for Rawls is *limited* from the outset by what reality imposes as the constraints on just institutional structure; it is limited to a conception of civil and political liberties for peoples – translated back into more conventional idioms of IR as norms and rules establishing the reciprocally recognized rights of states. It is the status quo of today's Westphalian notion of inter-state justice and accompanying "trickle-down" theory of individual civil and political liberties, but with universal buy-in and the hope that burdened societies will be assisted and outlaw societies will learn the ways of reasonableness.

It remains that Rawls gives less energy to the work of non-ideal theorizing: the action required to reduce the gap between the goals of ideal theory and where we are. And so those who object to the ideal having precedence for Rawls will not be swayed, not even by "realistic" utopia. However, for Dewey and Addams, priority of one over the other, ideal or non-ideal theory is not the question. The two are integrated in pragmatic method and no distinction of this kind is made, although what is on offer - a

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<sup>5</sup> Simmons (2010), 31.

realistic utopia - has similar motivations. Rawls, Addams, and Dewey are writing with a view to the future, setting a goal for the direction in which international society *should* be headed. Their international normative theorizing is forward-looking in this sense. Also the principles of justice articulated are those each finds immanent within our human situation – our natures, our environments - and conditioned by it. For neither Rawls, Dewey, nor Addams is this a compromise like that Rawls understood E.H. Carr to be making in *The Twenty Years Crisis*<sup>6</sup> between realism and utopianism, power and political right and justice. Instead, they seek to place limits on the exercise of power in line with that immanent ideal of justice each isolates. It is this horizon of the future and the fact that it *could be* realized which lends ethical significance to action in the world today.

The difference that is realistic utopia derived from pragmatist method rests in how it is given content. It is not arrived at by formal rules that require strict compliance with all else measured against it. Instead, it is found in personal relations and individuals working cooperatively in solving shared problems. At its base, is the assumption that any ideas generated may not map on to each other or be compelling for all, so what counts as a good idea cannot be determined in advance or stipulated as a rule or abstract principle, but has to be discovered in an experimental process of social interaction that ebbs and flows and has no natural end. Consequently, the alternative that pragmatic method is to ideal and non-ideal theorization is in its insistence that any ideal to be tried has to grow out of this ebb and flow of social relations, and any ethic found in it will lack fixed nodes and be subject to variation. Nonetheless, it will have a certain essence: that of being an attitude oriented to our relations with others, a commitment to engage one another in solving shared indeterminacies such that all those affected have a share in decision-making. In other words, it will be democratic and oriented to justice for individuals, rather than states, and any requisite international social institutions will be shaped by and shape this attitude. This is a *global*, as opposed an international justice, and it is not just civil/political, but concerns all that human flourishing and individual development requires.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Carr (1939).

It could be that this essence, this democratic attitude, no matter how contingently held due to pragmatism's fallibilism, nonetheless works as a comprehensive doctrine that oppresses some. Robert Talisse believes that Rawls has something fundamentally right: that political liberalism cannot rest on comprehensive doctrines or state policies that will inevitably tread on the democratic will of some, given the fact of pluralism across moral, religious and traditional beliefs<sup>7</sup>. Thus, Dewey's notion of democracy as "a way of life", which he credits to Addams, is not viable - nor is Addams's.

Melvin Rogers replies to Talisse, arguing that what matters most is how one stands in relation to those commitments (2009, 78). If they are fallible and not fixed, arguably the fuller conception of global justice that results from pragmatism's democratic attitude is a preferable direction in which to err; that is, if the understanding of human values from which these attitudes emanate are dynamic enough to deliver upon the epistemic openness promised in its linking of democracy and social inquiry and the working of its method in the diversity of experience.

To assess whether pragmatism can indeed deliver in this way, the next section examines the nature of the indeterminacies to which pragmatist method was applied in America's Progressive era, focusing on the life and work of Addams, but returning to Dewey in the conclusion to highlight the difference that is her feminist, relational pragmatist method.

## **2. "Subjective Necessity" within Two Realms: the Local and the Global**

Pragmatism is imbued with the history of the Progressive era. From the mid 1880s, a new social radicalism was embraced in response to the ravages of industrialism. A sense of malaise about society's organization, feelings about the "perplexities" of contemporary American life and disconnection with the

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<sup>7</sup> Talisse (2007).

social order were challenging individuals to explore what set their consciences and their conduct apart in relation to conditions of extreme poverty, poor working conditions, dispiriting work, class division, dislocation, crime and delinquency. In this, Addams identified an emergent humanitarianism. She described a growing concern for human welfare that sought to overcome feelings of maladjustment through meeting others anew in shared activity and reciprocal recognition. Addams saw it "characterized by a desire to get "back to the people", to be identified with the common lot", which in her words, "magnified the obligation inherent in human relationships as such"<sup>8</sup>.

Transforming this moral sensibility into a democratic social ethics was central to the life work of Addams. Her writing on global justice cannot be set apart from her experience as a social reformer who persistently asked whether democracy as a way of life could answer substantive doubt about social, economic and political problems at home and beyond the neighborhood of the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward of Hull House in Chicago.

For Addams, it is the capacity of adaptive, social beings to shape our social and political institutions in directions that cooperative, creative intelligence chooses, if – and this is an important "if", which Addams gave much thought – the requisite sentiment, empathy, and moral energy could be summoned. First and foremost, broad recognition of the problem was needed. As she wrote and wrote often, this was an "age demanding social morality" and to miss this was "utterly to fail to apprehend the situation."<sup>9</sup> Second, she was also clear that this kind of morality had to emerge from a relational practice, one that was inclusive and engaged community in all its diversity. The integration of immigrant communities, the working poor, African Americans and women in all aspects of social life was critical to meeting the problematic situation. This belief was grounded in her philosophical anthropology. Addams did not define human nature as such, but hers – like Dewey's – was an evolutionary understanding. For Addams, the person is a growing organism, organically linked through an ancient race life of instincts, which evolve over time.

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<sup>8</sup> Addams (1935), 55.

<sup>9</sup> Addams (1907), 2-3.

Consistent with the anthropology of her day, she believed humans share in primordial instincts, and focused on the starvation struggle and what gets triggered in us upon seeing hunger in the young: a will to helpfulness. "Nothing so deadens the sympathies and shrivels the power of enjoyment, as the persistent keeping away from the great opportunities for helpfulness and a continual ignoring of the starvation struggle which makes up the life of at least half the race"<sup>10</sup>. Addams's time at Hull House had demonstrated "the fact that pliable human nature is relentlessly pressed upon by its physical environment"<sup>11</sup>. Thus, a will to help others is thereby motivated and personhood recognized.

It was the marginalized at the bottom of society, directly experiencing the defects of contemporary social, political, and economic arrangements from whom we had the most to learn according to Addams. They understood better than others that the starvation struggle necessitated practices of assistance in sustaining each other. The other half of humanity, not in touch with the ancient instincts the starvation struggle enlisted, are sure to have felt as she wrote, the "longings for a fuller life which should include the use of these faculties"<sup>12</sup>, and it required being "in contact with the moral experiences of the many... to procure an adequate social motive"<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, she claimed that it was an ethical responsibility upon us all to seek diverse social relationships, that collaborative efforts were enriched to the extent we do so. Addams writes that Hull House "was opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal"<sup>14</sup>.

The clearest statement of Addams's "genuine emotion", as she writes, for turning these convictions into motive is her essay, "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements", a necessity that will not stop at the edges of the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward. The 1893 essay portends the international turn her writing and activism would take.

Three subjective aims motivated her work at Hull House. The first was to interpret democracy in social

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<sup>10</sup> Addams (1923), 116-7.

<sup>11</sup> Addams (1907), 186.

<sup>12</sup> Addams (1923), 117.

<sup>13</sup> Addams (1907), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Addams (1893), 1.

terms. Democracy was partial, left only to “political expression” in the ideas of franchise and political equality. “We are forced to acknowledge that it is only in our local and national politics that we try very hard for the ideal [of democracy] ... We have almost given it up as our ideal in social intercourse”<sup>15</sup> where Addams believed it was sorely needed. The second, was Addams’s invocation of the “primordial” motives within us in assisting the development of our race life or humanity; that is, how “[o]ur very organism holds memories and glimpses of that long life of our ancestors which still goes on among so many of our contemporaries”<sup>16</sup>, the will to helpfulness. Third, is the evidence of “a certain *renaissance* of Christianity”<sup>17</sup>, a movement resembling Christianity’s early humanitarianism that she wants to interpret as an idea in line with social progress over the ages that fellowship with others in social relationships builds “a deep enthusiasm for humanity” and in sharing “the common lot that they might receive the constant revelation”<sup>18</sup>. In a more contemporary idiom, Addams writes that it takes on “simple and natural expression in the social organism itself”<sup>19</sup>. The settlement movement was evidence of a growing humanitarianism for Addams and Hull House a manifestation of realistic utopia as she envisioned it locally<sup>20</sup>.

With America’s entry into the club of imperial powers, followed by the onset of World War I, social conditions shifted in another set of troubling directions that led her to an idea of international peace conceived in terms of social justice. Her aim was to cultivate a democratic attitude for living globally. However, our social relatedness in this arena required illumination too and again she turned her attention to the motivations that could generate an international ethics of this kind. The three themes above return in writing that articulates the subjective necessity for conjoint international social activity.

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<sup>15</sup> Addams (1893), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Addams (1893), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Addams (1893), 2, Hervorhebung im Original

<sup>18</sup> Addams (1893), 18.

<sup>19</sup> Addams (1893), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Hamington (2007), 173 identifies Hull House as a feminist, process utopia, which establishes a series of realistic goals with the idea that when the first set among these is fulfilled, the achievement of the next in the series becomes a more open possibility.



Firstly, that democracy should be interpreted in social terms for the global realm is reflected in her insistence that the human factor must be brought into the foreground of relations between states and any new forms of international organization. Whether a dynamic social democracy of the nation, or scaling up to a cosmopolitan one, the basic idea is the same for Addams: an attitude of respect for all persons, motivated through the relations of global neighbors engaged in the daily practices of life sustaining activities is required. Thought and action was needed towards the development of a new kind of diplomacy making individuals, not just states, subjects of justice, and an idea of justice inclusive of not only political, but economic, social and cultural aspects too. Addams believed that states place limits on the intercourse through which relational activity might otherwise obtain, obscuring an emergent transnational interest and thus, the scope of social ethics. Global justice requires an enlarged cosmopolitan welfare community. For Addams, it was in “helping relations” that the seeds of a new international order built on cosmopolitan justice could find foundations.

Secondly, Addams turns again to the theme of primal instincts as both a motivational resource and a relational epistemology for constructing this kind of international society. Accessing the sympathies inherent in these instincts requires imagination, for which Addams turned to Romantic poetry and mythical figures to unlock<sup>21</sup>. Wordsworth’s poem, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and his notion that “[o]ur birth is but a sleeping and forgetting” is with Addams as she works to remind us of our longings for social relations and to assist where we can. The starvation struggle is, as she writes, “the physical complement of the “Intimations of Immortality” on which no ode yet has been written”<sup>22</sup>. Addams invokes the myths of feminine spirits such as the Corn Spirit and the Rice Mother to bring women back to the race memory of their primitive bread labor. Her intention was to lend women’s helping relations “poetry and significance”<sup>23</sup>. Thus, her pragmatic method incorporates aesthetic and rhetorical tools for motivating sentiment and imagination capable of extending caring relationships

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<sup>21</sup> Addams (1893), 8, writes that literature in general has an important role in motivating a “desire to know all kinds of life” and fuels belief in the idea that knowing its diversity leads to “better social adjustment – for the remedying of social ills.”

<sup>22</sup> Addams (1893), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Addams (1922), 77.

across humanity. For Addams, the moment was ripe for investing women's experience and primal sympathies with epistemic authority. War "had forced the nations to consider together the primitive questions of famine and pestilence"<sup>25</sup>, enabling new ethical possibilities.. The practical work of women managing global food needs, cross-border health issues, and the suffering of refugees, as happened in the war years and immediately after, would make contributions to internationalism like those she attributed to the networks of immigrants she lived and worked with at Hull House, which were "interlacing nation to nation with a thousand kindly deeds"<sup>26</sup>. Thus, Addams transforms the starvation struggle into a global politics encouraging women to seek out new intersocietal outlets for fulfilling this age-old responsibility.

Finally, this new international ethic was grounded in humanitarian sentiment. It was a cosmopolitanism that saw all human beings linked in community regardless of nation, race, religion or sex and deserving of equal moral respect. The work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Geneva was a future-oriented experiment, putting in process through trial and error a remaking of intersocietal interaction guided by cosmopolitan or humanitarian intent. Just as the settlement movement was an example of a revived Christian humanism on the national scale for Addams, so too was the potentiality inherent in the League of Nations and the work of organizations such as hers. Addams wrote of a spirit of Geneva, of a faith in internationalism she found shared by those working within the League Assembly in particular as well as voluntary organizations. While the League in many ways reflected the political terms of the Allied victors, it employed a rhetoric of democracy consistent with the liberal internationalism born of the Progressive era, which like WILPF's was expansive. The rights of small nations and minorities gained new acceptance through the League, but also, the social and economic needs of individuals were to be part of its purview. The League's Social Section addressed issues such as fair labour standards, the control of disease, action in relation to the traffic in women,

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<sup>25</sup> Addams (1922), 85.

<sup>26</sup> Addams (1916), 132.

children, and drugs. WILPF locked in on this and pressed to make international public talk of social democracy effective.

The aim of her work with WILPF was to build out from food politics to enlarge the kind of social concerns that might be engaged at the international level. WILPF was among the first lobbying organizations at work in Geneva and took up concerns related to food shortages and relief work, enjoying early success in bringing the League to take on humanitarian relief work in the case of thousands of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek women and children who were being held captive in conditions of slavery and forced prostitution in Turkey. WILPF engaged in political democratic reform work, urging that the League make the Covenant more easily amendable, advocating German membership, lobbying for the direct representation of peoples and keeping channels of communication open with voluntary or non-governmental organizations. It pressed the League to make good on the promise that all positions were open to women as well as men, to protect minorities, and to perform in accordance with the "sacred trust" asserted in the Covenant towards the welfare of native peoples in its care under the Mandate system.

### **3. The Difference that is Addams**

When it comes to practical judgment about what democracy as a way of life requires at the international level, we find that Dewey and Addams departed paths on arguably the most significant matter of their day: the US decision to enter World War I. For Dewey, defeating Germany and moving on to the important business of public control of transnational interests and world organization required US participation. War was a necessary means to international democratic ends. Jane Addams, in the face of harsh public criticism from the American public and fellow progressives, maintained a pacifist stance; democracy as a way of life could not be realized through such means. What explains this departure?

Departures such as theirs are part and parcel of what pragmatic method generates on the way to realistic utopia. The endpoint cannot be fixed any more than human nature. Practical judgment in relation to an

ideal has no fixed decision rules beyond what epistemic openness requires for good problem solving. Testing democracy as a way of life and what it yields as a guide for international interaction can only be confirmed or denied in practice, and the interpretation of outcomes can vary with experience. Epistemic openness is confirmed in the separate judgments each took at the fork in the road that was US entry into WWI.

Addams's and Dewey's route to realistic utopia does not provide a marker as Rawls's does from which measurement can be taken as to how far we've come or how far we have left to go. There is an open-process best fueled and tested through plural and diverse perspectives. It is in these situations of seeking out diverse perspectives – of not having things in common - that the meddle of our ideas get tested. When our arguments meet opposition, unless blinded by dogma, we are forced to give pause. Addams was deeply affected by the opposition her pacifist views met and her departure from Dewey. Her autobiographical accounts and letters speak to the heavy weight of doubt she experienced in relation to this particular practical judgment, but on the occasion of a 1929 speech she gave on Dewey's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday she reflected that "where her path took a right angle to his, and women pacifists struggled in one country after another for a foothold in reality and actually found it, we were grateful to him for having taught us the method."<sup>27</sup> In her view, this particular means/ends judgment had held up to the scrutiny of experience as pragmatic method would ask of it.<sup>28</sup>

Perspective is everything in what set their judgments apart. Addams pragmatist method has a decidedly relational and feminist character. Its basic aim was to create connection and explore what women's sentiments and experience could generate towards generalized care projected outward from the private sphere of the home into civic and international realms. It was both a form of relational epistemology and social advocacy. Making good on these aims meant seeing from the margins of society - from the vantage point of women, from that of the poor, from immigrants, minorities, native peoples,

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<sup>27</sup> Addams (1929), Microfilm.

<sup>28</sup> Addams believed that war's end would be best won by a neutral US brokering peace. See Addams, Balch, and Hamilton (1915).

looking for what spurs a democratic attitude in matters of every day life not normally invested with democratic significance internationally. For Addams, these groups and the particular complex of inequalities each experiences carries a different form of embodied knowledge within which we find alternative and improved ways for coping with social change. This knowledge is a good in and of itself, but also triggered is a sense of responsibility to engage others in working cooperatively towards not just better coping, but social justice with cosmopolitanism at its centre. We are changed through the relational process as we seek "diversified human experience and resultant sympathy"<sup>29</sup>. Dewey posed the problem of the public, but it was Addams who applied that idea to the international as well as the domestic level, and worked to overcome it, asking what generates social sentiment and importantly, what turns sentiment into moral energy and democratic action of this kind. Addams was unique among pragmatists for the focused attention she gave to the motivations required to nurture any emergent possibilities for global justice.

Her relational and feminist pragmatic method sought to illuminate what microlevel social relations could bring to emerging macrolevel international institutional arrangements lived democratically. In the advocacy of WILPF, like the helping relations Addams aimed to realize through Hull House, WILPF sought to uncover the empirical facts at the base of situations of international concern with a view to using that knowledge.<sup>30</sup> However, in the remit of international politics where there was less scope for women's action than settlement politics for instance, WILPF had to fashion its own epistemic authority and it was on the basis of their experience - as relief workers, food providers in the war and nurturers in the domestic sphere - as well as the use of expertly crafted rhetoric, metaphors of maternal protection, maternal care for life, and notions of women's guardianship over morality. And seeing into the need for social relatedness required settings in which connection could be found. As with Hull House, WILPF's

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<sup>29</sup> Addams (1907), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Deegan (1988), 38-9 describes Hull House as a commune of women sociologists who sought data to apply the experiment of enhancing democratic life. Their Hull House Maps and Papers project was a major sociological work in this vein. WILPF adopted a practice of appointing referents to become experts in areas of League policy they wanted to influence, who would conduct research and site visits, and organize conferences with relevant experts.

Maison Internationale was a site of such exchange, as were regular International Congresses of national sections of WILPF, corridors and meeting rooms of the League, and yearly WILPF international summer schools. These were the routes to intersocietal democracy as a way of life.

Arguably, Addams and WILPF identified an immanent global ethics and made their own contribution to shaping cosmopolitan humanitarian sentiment. The idea that welfare provision then and in the future required global cooperation and that this functional cooperation would require new institutional structures, and socially democratic ones, putting individual human beings at their centre, has anchors in the global politics of today. Addams's future-oriented experiment for global justice is still in process. Addams understood that creating and sustaining motivation for the work was vital and could not be stimulated by practical need alone, nor could it be forced from command working top down. Our best practical judgments are won in involvements with uncommon others, meeting the challenges of plurality, experimenting with what works among those affected. This is no small feat, requiring tireless energy, of which Addams was a model. Hers is both an philosophical method and an activism that meets Talisse's concern for epistemic openness and yet remains focused on the motivations for relational activity capable of generating global democracy as a way of life.

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