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This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:
Mattarollo, L., Santarelli, M. (2024). Jane Addams and the Limits of Sympathy. Failures, Corrections, and Lessons to be Learned. CONTEMPORARY PRAGMATISM, 21(2), 155-176 [10.1163/18758185-bja10084].

Availability:
This version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/11585/976578 since: 2024-08-03

Published:

DOI: http://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-bja10084

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(Article begins on next page)

10 October 2026

This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of:

Livio Mattarollo, Matteo Santarelli, *Jane Addams and the Limits of Sympathy. Failures, Corrections, and Lessons to be Learned*, *Contemporary Pragmatism*, *21*(2), 155-176.

The final published version is available online at:

https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-bja10084

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Jane Addams and the limits of sympathy. Failures, corrections, and lessons to be learned

Livio Mattarollo, Matteo Santarelli

Abstract: Jane Addams takes sympathetic knowledge as a key concept for her moral and political philosophy. However, regarding the classical objections to sympathy as a foundation for morality and democracy, some theoretical remarks are still needed. In this article we aim at showing that the main problem is not due to the absence but to the qualitative import of sympathy in democratic societies. To achieve this goal, we firstly consider Addams' idea of sympathetic knowledge in light of the influence of social evolutionary theorizing and her distinction between individual and social ethics. Secondly, we analyze the 1894 Pullman strike and the "newsboy" case, and we argue that failures in sympathy may be corrected by a horizontal process. As a result, we consider them not only as failures but mainly as lessons to be learned towards democracy as a *rule of living*.

Keywords: Jane Addams - Sympathetic Knowledge - Fallibilism - Individual Ethics - Social Ethics

1.

The idea of sympathetic knowledge plays a key role in Jane Addams' theoretical and practical understanding of ethics and democracy (Fischer 2019; Knight 2005; Hamington 2009; Whipps 2017). This concept is pivotal to a full understanding of Addams' approach for at least three reasons. *First*, it shows the importance of affects in Addams' idea of democracy and ethics. In full alignment with the pragmatist approach, Addams maintains that democracy is not exclusively about rules, laws, and institutions. Democracy can exist only if we are able to live democratic lives, and this in turn depends on our capacity to be affected by the others and to include their perspectives. In this sense –as a *second* point– sympathy plays a momentous role

in enhancing the perspectives of citizens. The move from particularism to the broader perspective required for democracy is thus achieved *via* sympathetic affectively laden knowledge, and not through a disembodied and abstract universalism. And finally –*third* point– sympathy is not merely a passive affective state devoid of any cognitive content. Rather, it is characteristic of a distinctive kind of knowledge –viz. sympathetic knowledge– and involves a proactive attitude of concern towards the other. This is the main reason why some authors see Addams's approach as a pivotal anticipation of an ethics of care (Hamington 2009).

Scholars generally accept this three-part division as central to Addams' philosophical thought. Yet, from a wider perspective, the concept of sympathy has always been a controversial one in the history of Western moral and social philosophy. For many philosophers, sympathy is too fragile a foundation for human morality. The reasons for this fragility are at least three. First, human beings cannot be relied on to sympathize in predictable or rational ways. Sometimes we realize that we are failing to sympathize with someone who from a rational standpoint deserves our sympathy –and on the other hand, sometimes we have involuntary sympathetic feelings towards people who may not deserve them. Second, sympathy tends to be particularistic. A small injury suffered by a very dear person often elicits stronger sympathetic reactions than those provoked by a huge tragedy befalling people far away from us. Even when we "know" that the second situation deserves our unconditional sympathy, the closer situation can distract us and monopolize our sympathetic feelings. And third, sympathy is subject to the blunt strokes of our imagination, as our sympathetic feelings depend on our reconstruction of someone else's situation. We may sympathize with a person in what we see as a tragic or difficult situation, when in fact she is having the time of her life. Who decides who is right and who is wrong in such a situation? More importantly, from what perspective can such a decision be made? These problems have been raised and addressed not only by opponents of the sympathy paradigm – e.g., Kant – but also by its most prominent proponent, i.e., Adam Smith. It is in response to such issues that Smith introduces the figure of the impartial spectator as a judge of the conflicts between our moral feelings, able to authoritatively correct the shortcomings of our sympathy.[1]

Does Addams address these issues – or does she at least take them into account? Does she relate the idea of sympathetic knowledge to other theoretical elements of her philosophical thought? Or is she merely encouraging her fellow citizens to be more sympathetic, without deep foundations in theoretical reflection? Such questions have seldom been tackled by secondary

[1] This is a highly condensed representation of Smith's theory of sympathy. For a far more detailed account, see Stephen Darwall, "Empathy, Sympathy, Care", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 89, no. 2/3 (1998): 261–282; Sarah Songhorian, "Three Conceptions of Sympathy in Adam Smith", *Rivista di filosofia* 3 (2022): 397–420.

literature, yet their importance cannot be denied. Were Addams simply making claims without theoretical grounds, her perspective could not be considered philosophically sound; were she simply advocating for a more sympathetic world, her perspective would appear as idealistic, if not naive. In this paper, we will argue that her philosophical position is solid, and her political standpoint is concrete and realistic.

In the next few paragraphs, we focus on Addams' idea of sympathetic knowledge in light of 1) the influence of social evolutionary theories upon her ethical and political approach, and 2) her distinction between individual and social ethics, as stated in *Democracy and Social Ethics*. The aim of the article is to show how, according to Addams, the moral and political problem is not the scarcity of sympathy in democratic societies. Rather, the real problem is that people often sympathize in the wrong way –that is, they sympathize in an individualistic and particularistic manner which is out of phase with the social and democratic possibilities offered by contemporary society. To support this claim, we present a two-part argument. In section 1, we provide a historical and theoretical context of Addams´ view on sympathy, and we propose the idea of *ethical evolutionary drama* to conceptualize the clash between ethical frameworks within the social evolutionary perspective. In addition, we claim that, from Addams' point of view, social sympathetic knowledge involves being open to fallibilism and to a horizontal process of correction. In section 2 we analyze two cases considered by Addams in early essays and in her book *Democracy and Social Ethics*: the Pullman strike, which took place in Chicago in 1894, and the situation of the "newsboys", this is, the problem of child labour. The purpose of the section is to underline the qualitative differences between framing sympathetic knowledge into individual or social ethics as well as the corrective potential of enhancing social experience. By doing so, we attempt to show that Addams' account is far more nuanced and realistic than simply asking for more sympathy, and that her work highlights in a detailed manner the difficulties and ambiguities which appear when real people sympathize with their fellow human beings. Overall, we attempt to show how these difficulties and ambiguities may be considered not only as failures in sympathetic knowledge but also as learning opportunities on the path towards proper democracy as a *rule of living*.

2.

Before delving deeper into Addams' idea of sympathy, some historical remarks –necessarily summary, insofar as we are not directly interested in a project of historical reconstruction– must be made. Secondary literature suggests various sources of inspiration and influence on Addams' work. Hamington (2022) claims that Carlyle's relational ethic is a precursor to Addams' idea of sympathy. Misheva (2019) suggests a possible line of influence which goes

from Adam Smith to Saint-Simon, and from Saint-Simon to Auguste Comte, an author whose work Addams knew well. And finally, Fischer (2019) draws a list of authors who may have influenced Addams' idea of sympathy. The list includes authors like William James –who in turn in his *Principles of Psychology* recommends reading Thomas Fowler's *The Principles of Morals* (Fischer 2019, 34)–, Edwar Caird (Fischer 2019, 120), and of course Charles Darwin (Fischer 2019, 60). Indeed, there are good reasons to speculate that Addams' interest in the topic of sympathy dates back to the early years of her education. In *Twenty Years at Hull House* she mentions a "callow writing" in which she claimed that justice must be broadened by "broadened sympathies towards the individual man or woman who crosses our path". Her witty comment on this text reads as follows: "I do not wish to take callow writing too seriously, but I reproduce from an oratorical contest the following bit of *premature pragmatism*, doubtless due much more to temperament than to perception, because I am still ready to subscribe to it, although the grandiloquent style is, I hope, a thing of the past" (Addams 1912, 58, emphasis added).

These multifaceted influences can be quite easily detected in two defining features of Addams' concept of sympathetic knowledge: 1) the connection between sympathy and moral evolution; 2) the idea that sympathy has to do with both feelings and inquiry.

As previously mentioned, we know that Addams read Darwin's works (including *Descent of Man*) in college, and it is no matter of chance that her account of sympathy resonates with Darwin's on an important point.[2] According to Darwin, moral progress has to do with increasing generalization of sympathetic instincts. At the dawn of human evolution, sympathy was limited exclusively to in-group members. The development of civilization involves a process of generalization of sympathetic feelings, which end up having the human being as their object: "The very idea of humanity [...] seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings" (Darwin 1871, 1-97). In formulating her idea of sympathy, Addams clearly follows Darwin's evolutionary approach. In contemporary societies, sympathy acquires its moral significance as it is directed beyond the strict boundaries of the group. Therefore, the key moral problem is not framed in the classical "self-interest vs. sympathetic behavior" schema. While many human beings are capable of being sympathetic with members of the same group or community, habits of sympathetic feelings directed beyond the in-group are not yet

[2] For more on the strict relationship between Addams and evolutionism, see Marilyn Fischer, *Jane Addams' Evolutionary Theorizing. Constructing "Democracy and Social Ethics"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019) and Trevor Pearce *Pragmatism's Evolution. Organism and Environment in American Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020). Generally speaking, the following paragraphs are deeply indebted to Fischer's pivotal work.

established. Addams' main concern is the tension between particularistic sympathy and the evolution of morality which points towards generalization, if not universality. In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams will conceptualize this tension in terms of a clash between "individual morality" and "social morality" – a point to which we will return in greater detail.

The second point is quite clearly implied by Addams' phrasing, i.e., *sympathetic knowledge*. On this subject, Addams aligns herself with the Scottish sentimentalist tradition in moral philosophy (especially with Smith's perspective) on two points. First, sympathy is immediate in the very specific sense that it does not result from a calculus aimed at maximizing the individual's self-interest. Second, she does not assume that sympathy provides infallible access to the other's feelings, nor that it is a purely affective process. Rather, sympathy is: 1) influenced by the information we have about the situation of a specific person; 2) possibly a means by which to increase and improve our understanding of a specific situation. It is easier to sympathize with someone's sadness if we know something about her situation and the reasons of her sadness. At the same time, an unexpected feeling of sympathy towards a specific person can increase our knowledge about the situation in which this person is involved. Addams condenses this complex array of interactions between feelings and knowledge in the term *sympathetic knowledge*. Sympathy is influenced by our knowledge, and at the same time it is a source of knowledge. Like any other sort of knowledge, sympathy is fallible, and it depends on our capacity to understand and to imagine.[3]

These two features help us illuminate a crucial move made by Addams in *Democracy and Social Ethics*. In the six chapters composing the book she does not merely sing the praises of the moral and political virtues of sympathy in itself. Rather, Addams argues that sympathetic knowledge is a part of social morality, allowing her to show how flawed and misleading sympathy can be if it remains locked within the frame of individual morality.

The plea for a shift from individual to social morality is a hallmark of *Democracy and Social Ethics*. The meaning of this shift can be fully grasped only as part of Addams' evolutionary approach. Fischer (2019) masterfully explains how the evolutionary approach –prominent in the original texts– fades away in the versions published in *Democracy and Social Ethics.* This standpoint is apparently replaced by the opposition between individual vs. social ethics. While agreeing with Fischer, we believe that it is impossible to grasp the meaning of this opposition outside Addams' evolutionary framework. Individual and social ethics do not represent purely subjective moral perspectives which randomly depend on the subjective inclinations of different individuals. Rather, they are moral perspectives formed from specific habits and attitudes which emerge in the interactions with specific social environments. Sometimes –as

[3] This feature is key to both Fowler's and Smith's accounts of sympathy.

is the case with individual ethics– these moral habits and attitudes survive the demise of the social environment from which they emerged. As we will see, such survival is a major source of social conflict in Addams' view. Therefore, if in the final versions of the chapters composing *Democracy and Social Ethics,* the evolutionary standpoint is much less central than it was in the original texts, yet familiarity with the concept is still necessary to fully grasp the relationship between individual and social ethics.

This suggests that Addams' criticism of individual ethics should not be mistaken for a simple moral condemnation of individual self-interest leading to a call for altruism and care for others. Rather, individual ethics involves a set of virtues (e.g., industry, sacrifice, frugality) and ways of caring for others. However, these virtues and these ways of caring are short-sighted and lead to undesirable consequences. The main problem with these "individual" attitudes is that they are out of phase with the emerging possibility of a new social ethics based on association, cooperation, and democratic relationships. While the new democratic society requires a more interactive and encompassing way of cooperating and dealing with social issues, many people cannot seem to reason beyond individual ethics.

Addams' advocacy of social morality therefore is not merely idealistic. Rather, it is realistically grounded in an analysis of the new social and economic conditions of the United States at the time of its writing[4]. It follows the historical mechanisms of development of labor and industry, which require increasing social control, not achievable through individual virtues that had their heyday in an earlier socio-economic system –e.g., in a "shop-floor economy" (cf. Addams 1902, 94). It is neither chance nor moral superiority that causes manufacturers think and act politically with a broader, more general mindset– (though in some passages, Addams seems to suggest that the manufacturers' tendency to generalize takes on a compensatory function with respect to the specialization of labor [Addams 1965, 95]). The social and working conditions characterizing their lives lead them to frame moral and political issues from the standpoint of association and cooperation, rather than from the perspective of individual virtues. While the shift from individual and social morality should involve the whole society, Addams seems to suggest here that some social groups are in a better position to develop democratic habits than others, as they are more in tune with the possibilities created by the emerging social order, and they are more negatively affected by the stubborn survival of individual ethics.[5] At the same time, the emerging possibilities are overshadowed by outdated

[4] On the close relationship between activism and research, see Nuria Font-Casaseca, "Mapas contra la injusticia urbana: La utopía pragmática de la Hull House en Chicago a finales del siglo XIX" (Barcelona, 2016): 1–19.

[5] This of course opens to a discussion concerning the relationship between Addams and Marxist socialism. Addams' evolutionary perspective could be criticized from a Marxist perspective; one might argue, for example, that individual ethical codes do not simply reproduce through evolutionary inertia, but some groups have an interest in

individual moral habits entrenched in powerful social groups and in important social characters within US society at the time of writing.

The persistence of old moral habits in the new social environment is the source of what we will call *ethical evolutionary dramas*[6], i.e., dramas provoked by the coexistence of old inertial habits –which emerged and likely played a positive role in a previous social environment which no longer exists– and a new environment –which includes not only actual ideas, behaviors, and institutions, but also emerging possibilities and opportunities. These dramas are enacted both at the interpersonal level –i.e., conflict between people– and at the intrapersonal level –i.e., conflict between old internalized habits and new emerging needs, desires, and interests.[7] Since the self from a pragmatist perspective is the outcome of a process of internalization of social organization and of social practices, social dramas are often re-enacted in the personal forum of selfhood.[8]

Addams' use of the concept of sympathy in *Democracy and Social Ethics* must be framed in this move from individual ethics to social ethics. Rather than merely supporting sympathy and the ideal of a more sympathetic society, Addams proposes the need for *a social sympathetic knowledge*, and consequently shows the limits and the shortcomings of sympathy when exercised from the standpoint of individual morality. This involves two momentous consequences: 1) errors in sympathizing are often not due to intentions, but rather because those sympathizing are stuck in the morass of individual ethics; 2) endorsing and practicing social sympathetic knowledge involves being open to correction and fallibilism. This is a higher standard than we can obtain with mere good intentions, feelings and care for other persons.[9] Corrections cannot be obtained by appealing to the *vertical* authority of the impartial

blocking the development of social ethics. Despite Addams' proximity with some socialist groups, there is a link here between social evolutionism and Marxism which Addams never fully develops.

[6] We use the term "drama" in a generic sense, and not in the theatrical and literary sense. It is nonetheless true that, in representing these dramas, Addams often refers to literary dramas. For a deeper analysis of the comparison between Lear and Cordelia, on one hand, and Pullman and workingmen, on the other –and for a more comprehensive inquiry into the references to tragic heroines scattered throughout Addams' bibliography– see Sara Núria Miras Boronat "Jane Addams: ideali di pace (vecchi e nuovi). Un approccio tragico", *Società degli individui* 74(2) (2022): 37–41.

[7] For more on Addams' challenge of the private-public dichotomy, see Federica Castelli, "Love, Politics, and Public/Private Porosity", *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, XV*(1) (2023).

[8] We find this idea clearly expressed in Mead, an author who was intellectually and personally very close to Addams. See George Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934). On Mead's idea of sympathy, see Guido Baggio, G. H. Mead and the Pragmatist Basis of (Neuro)economics, in R. Madzia, M. Jung (eds.), *Pragmatism and Embodied Cognitive Science: From Bodily Interaction to Symbolic Articulation*, de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston (2016): pp. 185-210.

[9] We therefore fully agree with Whipps, as she compellingly argues that Addams was deeply aware of the limits of sympathy, and that her (Addams') work is an ongoing practical reflection on these very limits. However, we do not follow her proposal to use the term "empathy" instead of "sympathy," for two reasons. First, many among the instances mentioned by Whipps clearly resonate with Smith's paradigmatic idea of sympathy. Second, on a historical level, we stick to the term "sympathy" as it highlights the continuities between Addams' own theorizing

spectator hypothesized by Smith –e.g., an authoritative figure who tells us what is worthy of sympathy and what is not, with no regard for the spontaneous, subjective nature of sympathy as we experience it. Rather, this correction is a *horizontal* process. The difficult integration between mercy and justice alluded to in the aforementioned "callous writing" can be achieved only if we "walk for many dreary miles beside the lowliest of his creatures, not even in peace of mind, that the companionship of the humble is popularly supposed to give, but rather with the pangs and misgivings to which the poor human understanding is subjected whenever it attempts to comprehend the meaning of life" (Addams 1899).

In the following section, we will develop our reconstruction of Addams' idea of sympathetic knowledge by analyzing several cases taken from *Democracy and Social Ethics.* Specifically, we want to show how the six chapters are more than bland encouragement for the development of a more sympathetic society. Rather, they look more like a gallery of (generally well-intentioned) *failures in sympathy*. In keeping with her experimentalist approach, Addams uses these failures as lessons to be learned in the difficult path from individual sympathy to social sympathetic knowledge –a path which Addams considers decisive for a full realization of democracy.

3.

If we consider sympathetic knowledge within the framework of either individual or social ethics in the context of the evolutionary perspective, and more precisely with respect to the idea of ethical evolutionary drama, then we can offer a new reading of Addams' analysis of several cases. We know that the works collected in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (except for the "Introduction" and some passages of the last chapter) were previously published as separate articles. The revised versions found in the book seem to downplay the evolutionary approach, choosing instead a clear distinction between individual and social ethics as the organizing axes, "[a] new conceptual framework, imposed on the essays with minimal revision, [which] fits awkwardly." (Fischer 2019, 168). The revised version of the articles, Fischer argues (2019, 176), results in a book lacking a consistent line of reasoning insofar as it adopts a "patchy strategy," broadening the theoretical axis of the original work to make it accessible to a wider audience.

on this point and the authors who classically contributed to define the paradigm of sympathy (as mentioned in the preceding paragraph on this topic). See Judy Whipps, "Dewey, Addams, and Design Thinking: Pragmatist Feminist Innovation for Democratic Change" in Fesmire (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 313–332.

Indeed, in *Democracy and Social Ethics* the evolutionary framework given by the British socialists' accounts of the evolution of democracy and by the German anthropological accounts of moral evolution, both cited by Addams in the original papers, are masked and replaced by the axis of individual and social ethics, which are not sufficient to provide a coherent analysis of each case under study. Taking this criticism into account, we propose to integrate the evolutionary perspective advocated by Fischer with Addams' distinction between individual and social ethics. From this position, we will address Addams' analysis of the Pullman strike, both in its "original" and revised versions, as well as the "newsboy" case, in order to offer a more complex and comprehensive reading of them. In so doing, we will highlight some features of sympathetic knowledge and offer a general reading of *Democracy and Social Ethics,* which we view as both as a gallery of failures in sympathetic knowledge and as a series of lessons to be learned.

The Pullman strike took place in Chicago between May and July of 1894. By 1890, George M. Pullman, founder and president of the Pullman Palace Car Company –one of the most influential companies at the time, given the pivotal role of rail travel in the nation's then-booming economy–, had built a "model town" for his workers and their families. The town was situated on a 3.500 acre lot, and included brick houses, stores, schools, churches, a bank, a post-office, a theater, and a park for recreation. The whole town was managed by the company, which bought gas and water from the city and resold them to the workers at fixed-prices, while piping collected sewage to the company's farm to be used as fertilizer. As is widely acknowledged, the town was operated under a feudal system in which the lord-cum-capitalist followed an ethic of reciprocal but asymmetric obligations insofar as he was supposed to be responsible for providing basic material resources and safety to their workers (Linn 1935, 199; Fischer 2019, 82–83). With the economic recession of 1893 and the terrible winter of 1893-94, the company ordered a reduction in wages and fired one-third of its workers, but did not lower the rent or the prices of basic supplies being sold to workers in the town. These cuts were merely a short-term manifestation of long-term problems tied to Pullman's industrial paternalism (Knight 2005, 310). In any case, and despite a contract clause forbidding unionization, many of them joined the American Railway Association and initiated a strike in May 1984. Following the failure of arbitration (which included a first attempt by Addams herself as a member of the Chicago Civic Federation's Conciliation Board), the Association called for a national strike –at that moment, the largest coordinated strike in the history of the United States. Ignoring the protest of the Governor of Illinois, John Peter Altgeld, President Grover Cleveland sent the federal troops to the city, leading to the eruption of violence,

including several deaths and hundreds of arrests. The strike was broken by mid-July and workers were forced to return to their houses under the conditions set by the company.[10]

Addams participated in the initial phase of negotiations, but stepped down to due to her sister's illness (she would die that July). Nonetheless, she wrote a very interesting essay about the Pullman strike entitled "A Modern Tragedy", which was delivered several times as a speech, but was not published until 1912, due to the controversial nature of its content, under the title "A Modern Lear".[11] Beyond the rich comparison between the participants of the strike and the characters of Shakespeare's "King Lear", the proposal here is to analyze the episodes in light of the aforementioned philosophical framework. To begin with, it seems clear that the whole episode represents not only a transition from feudal to associated relationships, but presents moreover a coexistence - and, ultimately, a clash of - ethical perspectives, at the social as well as the personal level.[12] Feudal ethical survivals, such as individual virtue and the noble impulses of a benefactor or philanthropist, coexisted with the rising tide of the workers' wider moral view, expressed in terms of brotherhood, sacrifice, and the primacy of class membership and cause. The confluence and clash of these elements sparked an ethical evolutionary drama which can be observed not only in the Pullman strike, but also in episodes such as the National Cash Register Company strike (Dayton, Ohio, 1902), clearly displaying the underlying conflict of ethical standpoints.

George Pullman was at the center of the stage. To begin with, Pullman certainly attempted to develop some sort of sympathetic knowledge as regarded his employees. He spent time thinking about their needs and tried to build a place in which "ugly, discordant and demoralizing" elements were eliminated (Linn 1935, 164). Moreover, he was honestly concerned with the well-being of his workers, a point recognized by Addams in "A Modern Lear", writing that he "[…] doubtless began to build his town from an *honest desire* to give his employes the best surroundings" (Addams 1965, 112), as well as in the version published in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, saying that "he [Pullman] honestly believed that he knew better than they what was for their good, as he certainly knew better than they how to conduct his business. As his factory developed and increased, making money each year under his direction,

[10] For a detailed reconstruction of the Pullman Strike and the role played by Addams, see Louise Knight, *Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 309–322.

[11] There are four versions of Addams' talk on the Pullman strike, three of which are entitled "A Modern Tragedy" and are found in manuscript form, dated 1894 and 1895. The last version was published under the title "A Modern Lear" and includes new material in its first pages (see Knight, *Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy*, p. 507).

[12] According to Fischer, Addams based her analysis on Fabian's account of socialism, and on the idea that economic history could be explained as an evolutionary process from feudalism to socialism (see Fischer, *Jane Addams' Evolutionary Theorizing*, pp. 80–83).

he naturally expected the town to prosper in the same way." (1964, 144). In the same vein, Pullman was honestly disappointed by the attitude of his workers, for he expected them to show respect and gratitude for his (feudal) generosity.

However, Pullman's efforts and reactions were misguided. Indeed, his attempt to build a model town cannot be considered without acknowledging the fact that it would increase his image of benevolence and power. According to Addams, this point shows that Pullman's aims were not simply commercial, but were also a manifestation of his personal ambitions. The resulting distance closed him off from his workers, making it impossible for him to understand their needs (Addams 1965, 113).

In our reading, the main issue with Pullman's sympathetic approach towards his workers was its individual ethical framework, which takes personal virtues and effort as its cornerstone. From this perspective, it is possible to explain two important points: on one hand, insofar as Pullman only considered an individual ethical framework, his honestly sympathetic intention could not process or adapt to the collective effort and to the expression of common needs by the workers and the inhabitants of the town. Hence, Pullman maintained a strongly paternalistic approach, for he was convinced that he himself knew best the needs of his men. Far from allowing the workingmen to express their needs, he denied them the rights of trade organization (Addams 1965, 111). In addition, Pullman's individual ethical framework prevented him from acquiring the sympathetic knowledge which would allow him to understand the reaction of his employes towards the reduction of wages as well as the *new basis* of the underlying demands. Indeed, he almost completely lost any sympathetic connection with the workers, in particular with respect to the critical situation prior to - and during the strike. As Addams points out, "[Pullman] cultivated the great and noble impulses of the benefactor, until the power of attaining a simple human relationship with his employees, that of frank equality with them, was gone from him. *He, too, lost the faculty of affectionate interpretation*, and demanded a sign. He and his employees had no mutual interest in a common cause." (Addams 1965, 113, emphasis added).

On the other hand, his individual ethical framework explains Pullman's failure to reassess his conviction of being right. During the first weeks of the strike, there were several unfruitful attempts to arbitrate the conflict. In "A Modern Lear" Addams claims that

> He [Pullman] stood throughout pleading for the individual virtues, those which had distinguished the model workman of his youth [...]. *Of the new code of ethics, he had caught absolutely nothing*. [...] Day after day during that horrible suspense, when the wires constantly reported the same message, "The president of the company holds that there is nothing to arbitrate," one longed to find out what was in the mind of this man, to unfold his ultimate motive. One concludes that *he must have been sustained by the*

> *consciousness of being in the right*. Only that could have held him against the great desire for fair play which swept over the country. Only the training which an arbitrary will receives by years of consulting first its own personal and commercial ends could have made it strong enough to withstand the demands for social adjustment. [...] For years he had gradually accustomed himself to the thought that his motive was beyond reproach; that his attitude to his town was always righteous and philanthropic. Habit held him persistent in this view of the case through all the changing conditions. (1965, 116–117, emphasis added).

This paragraph illustrates the ethical drama as well as the limits of sympathetic knowledge when it is framed within an individual ethics. As for the first point, Addams explains that, even if the conceptions of morality pass through a course of development, her evolutionary approach suggests that there is a point at which difficulty arises in adjusting conduct hardened into habits or customs in order to fit new environments, social conditions, and changing moral conceptions –a difficulty certainly suffered by Pullman (Addams 1964, 13). As for the second point, Pullman was convinced that there was nothing to correct because his ethical framework made no room for a reflexive attitude about his own sympathetic knowledge and, hence, about the situation of his employees. His sympathetic knowledge framed within - and reinforced by - individual ethics eluded control and correction, both from the changing social environment and from the people surrounding him. In a brief comment, Addams explains that Pullman was trapped between "[…] the unparalleled publicity which brought him to the minds of thousands as a type of oppression and injustice, and to many others as an example of the evil of an *irregulated sympathy* for the lower classes." (Addams 1965, 110, emphasis added).

It is interesting to note, then, how the ethical framework adopted, either individual or social, can shape sympathy, offering resources to either reinforce the previous viewpoint, or to accept its own fallibilism and to adopt a reflexive attitude. In the first case, it is not that individual ethics is simply insufficient to correct sympathetic knowledge. More radically, it hinders reflexivity and self-correction, thereby contributing to a vicious cycle. In the second case, the actor must acknowledge that the initial ethical standpoint may be wrong, something that is achievable only by means of a wider and non-hierarchical social contact.

The revised version of the essay, published as a chapter in *Democracy and Social Ethics* under the title "Industrial Amelioration", keeps several of the most important features of the analysis, adding some mentions about the undemocratic conditions of the factory and the town, but making no explicit reference to Pullman nor to King Lear (although the latter will be a key character of chapter 2 on "Filial Relations"). Regarding this chapter, Fischer claims that the original reference to the feudal ethical structure and its evolution towards associationism is missed – even when Addams claims that "[…] as many times stated, we are passing from an age of individualism to one of association […]" (1964, 137). As a result, the chapter is

disjointed and presents two different critiques, namely of industry and of philanthropy, whose only common point is that "both are undemocratic in their failure to adopt a social ethics." (Fischer 2019, 178).

At this point it is worth making a few comments. To begin with, the argument advanced by Fischer about the introduction of the individual/social ethics couplet could be further qualified. Overall, the comparison between King Lear and Cordelia, on one hand, and Pullman and the workingmen, on the other, brings to the fore the dramatic sense in which two different ethical perspectives coexist, one based on indulgence and paternalism, and the other advancing the causes of self-expression and mutual interests. Indeed, Addams sets the problem in ethical terms when she claims both in "A Modern Tragedy" and "A Modern Lear" that the episodes could be endured only by seeing them as the source of a "great ethical lesson." In this sense, although the comparison makes no explicit reference to the distinction between individual and social ethics, it seems that the difference between ethical standpoints underlies Addams' initial analysis. Therefore, the introduction of the conceptual pair individual/social ethics in the revised version does not seem imposed as an external organizational scheme but rather it helps make the key concepts previously adopted explicit. If this is correct, the inclusion of the idea of ethical evolutionary drama explains the coexistence of two moral codes, namely the ethical survival of feudal values in the new era, expressed by the need for philanthropy experienced by many industrialists, and the social ethics expressed by labour unions and other associations. In addition, the idea of ethically framed sympathetic knowledge (in the case of Pullman, within an individual ethics) explains why philanthropy fails even when attempted in good faith by the industrialist. Therefore, this approach could offer a more comprehensive reading of the episode, insofar as (i) it conserves the evolutionary language advocated by Fischer, (ii) it maintains the validity of the difference between individual and social ethics, and (iii) it acknowledges the risk of ultimate failure in practical attempts to apply it to different social conditions. This is not just a failure in achieving a social ethics, but a failure in framing sympathetic knowledge within social ethics and, as a consequence, a failure to overcome the ethical evolutionary drama.

This latter conclusion may be better illustrated by the "newsboy" case as presented by Addams presents in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1964, 168–170).[13] Introduced as a rhetorical resource

[13] This is by no means an idly theoretical case: by the beginning of 20th Century, there were about 4000 newsboys and newsgirls in Chicago, doing their best to earn a few coins under terrible working conditions. In 1903, Addams was part of a 2-day inquiry into the situation of newsboys and newsgirls in Chicago. Research methods included interviews and sociological analysis, and led to a co-authored report suggesting new laws for the regulation of street trading. The initiative failed when, in the following years, newsboys were declared "merchants", and thus not subject to child-labour laws (see Stacy Lynn, *Jane Addams and the News Babies of Chicago*, 2017; also, Chicago Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Houses, "Newsboy Conditions in Chicago", 1903).

to call attention to the need for child-labour legislation, the case reconstructs three typical visions regarding a working-boy selling newspaper: (i) that of the *looking man*, who is proud of how the child is making his way in the world based on his own work and skills; (ii) that of the *philanthropic lady*, who feels compunction about the life-conditions of the boy and who will try to redouble her efforts to help not this individual, but many newsboys; and (iii) that of the *workingman* accustomed to trade-union methods, who already knows that the natural growth of the boy will be arrested due to his excessive forced activity, and who also knows that effective relief and protection can be given by proper child-labour laws. According to Addams, these three figures have a point in common, for they "[…] are all honest and upright, and recognize a certain duty toward the forlorn children of the community." (1964, 170). Taking this into account, these viewpoints are based on sympathy because they focus on the whole situation –and not only nor mainly on the feeling of the young boy– and there is a type of knowledge about the situation which leads each figure to act in a specific way. At first glance, it is easy to identify that there certainly is a difference between the reactions, which go from a particularistic and isolated approach to a general and contextualized approach, considering broader conditions. It is interesting to note that, even within an evolutionary process, at certain points these approaches overlap, but, insofar as they are incompatible due to the scope of each approach, they are likely to clash. Such incompatibility allows us to view this case as another example of ethical evolutionary drama.

In our reading, once it is acknowledged that each vision includes some kind of sympathetic knowledge, in the sense that all of them include an attempt to understand –and to sympathize with– the situation of the newsboy, the difference in reactions depend on the ethical framework employed by each observer. In general terms, both the looking man and the philanthropic lady view the situation through the lens of individual ethics, whereas the workingman approaches it from the viewpoint of social ethics. The first case is quite clear: the act of encouraging the newsboy by buying a paper from him, without any sense of moral shock, is in tune with the general features of individual ethics, which is based on personal effort and virtues, regardless of social conditions, and social adjustment. In this case, individual ethics frames, sympathetic knowledge and the individual approach is continuously reinforced. The second case is more complex because the philanthropic lady seems to understand that the newsboy is one out of many poor young boys, and hence she tries to help a few of them. Nonetheless, she still frames her sympathetic knowledge of him within an individual ethics based on effort, so she cannot understand the situation considering broader conditions. The third case is the most socially oriented, for the workingman acknowledges both that the newsboy must work to survive because of particular and concrete economic and social conditions, and that this is a structural social problem demanding structural social solutions

–e.g., child-labour laws– rather than individual remediation. In this sense, the social ethics framework helps sympathetic knowledge to avoid both abstract universalism –for the workingman knows both the broad conditions as well as the difficulties addressed by the young boy– and restricted particularism –for the workingman acknowledges that the solution must include *every* working-boy. Sympathetic knowledge is a complex phenomenon involving (and not only presupposing) affective interpretation, and an "affective background" that influences the way in which the situation of the other is imagined. In this case, the workingman knows more than just the needs of the newsboys; his understanding is deeper, for it is affectively informed (in a way that for instance seems impossible for the philanthropic lady), and represents a kind of understanding that bears in mind the social dimension of the situation. This is relevant because, according to Addams, the essential idea of democracy is the identification with "the common lot", that is, with shared needs, problems, and stock of experience (1964, 11). Therefore, framing sympathetic knowledge within social ethics expands the perspective and leads to a different kind of action oriented to solve social needs within the context of that particular notion of democracy.

To go into greater detail, it may be interesting to briefly focus on the figure of the charity visitor. Although her case presents differences in comparison with the philanthropic lady, it enriches the analysis because the charity relation addresses ethical perplexities which are, according to Addams, based on "ethical survivals" held by both the benefactor and the recipient, and that may be explained by their respective ethical codes (Addams 1899, 163).[14] Indeed, the charity visitor identifies the tension between her insistence on the industrial and economic individual virtues –such as hard work, self-support, and frugality– and the charms and virtues common to the recipients of her charity. In this sense, there is a difference of method but also "[…] an absolute clashing of two ethical standards." (Addams 1964, 19). However, the charity visitor undergoes a change that could be analysed in light of the view here proposed, insofar as her usual conventions and theories cannot deal with problems such as early marriage and child labour,

> [s]he finds both of these [her conventions and theories] fairly upset by her *intimate knowledge of the situation*, and her *sympathy for those into whose lives she has gained a curious insight*. She discovers *how incorrigibly bourgeois her standards have been*, and it takes but a little time to reach the conclusion that she cannot insist so strenuously upon the conventions of her own class, which fail to fit the bigger, more emotional, and freer lives of working people. (Addams 1964, 38, emphasis added).

[14] The original version of Addams' analysis of charity, entitled "The Subtle Problems of Charity" (1899) is reproduced nearly verbatim in the chapter entitled "Charitable Effort," contained in *Democracy and Social Ethics*. However, the original version includes a few comments about the difference of ethical perspectives or "ethical epochs" which were removed from the later version (see Fischer, *Jane Addams' Evolutionary Theorizing*, p. 180).

This passage presents two important points: First, when there is a deeper contact with the whole situation, sympathetic knowledge tends to increase, offering a broader perspective from which it is possible to contrast the inherited customs and habits –expressed in this passage in terms of bourgeois and working-people standards. Second, this new perspective highlights the limits of one's own views while offering an occasion to reconsider them. In this case, the difference with the looking-man –and probably with the philanthropic lady– is that sympathetic knowledge is reflexively corrected by the social environment and by others, and reassessed from a more socially oriented ethical framework. This process enacts a *horizontal correction* of sympathy, i.e., a kind of control which does not presuppose any authoritative criterion standing beyond experience (e.g., an impartial spectator, in Adam Smith's sense[15]) but, on the contrary, requires an affectively laden social contact to modify the quality of the ethical approach: "[…] the wider social activity, and the contact with the larger experience, not only increases her [the *charity lady*] sense of social obligation but at the same time recasts her social ideals. […] She has socialized her virtues not only through a social aim but by a social process." (Addams 1964, 69). If our reading is correct, framing sympathetic knowledge within social ethics represents a crucial step to control and to improve sympathy, and hence to overcome moral habits and biases based on prejudices and one-sided standards. Especially in times demanding new social adjustments, this process is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding and practice of democracy.

4.

In this paper we have attempted to reconstruct Jane Addams' concept of sympathy, and more specifically, of sympathetic knowledge. To this end, we integrated two perspectives identified in Addams' works: social evolutionary theories, which certainly inspired her early essays, and the distinction between individual and social ethics, explicitly proposed in *Democracy and Social Ethics*. In doing so, we tried to show that:

1) Addams was not naively advocating for "more sympathy". On the contrary, she was keenly aware of the limits and the shortcomings of the social uses of sympathy. From this standpoint, the chapters included in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (and the original articles which were

[15] Yet, some interpretations of Adam Smith highlight the corrective role played by the impartial spectator in a horizontal, and not merely in a vertical, sense. See Fonna Forman Barzilai, "Sympathy in Space(s): Adam Smith on Proximity", *Political Theory, 33*(2) (2005): 189–217.

revised in the published book) can be interpreted as composing a gallery of failures in sympathetic knowledge, and as lessons to be learned for the sake of the refinement of sympathetic abilities. To this end, there are two elements which bear highlighting. On the one hand, there is the idea of ethical evolutionary drama, a key element in explaining failures in sympathetic knowledge with respect to the clash between individual and social ethical frameworks –both at personal and interpersonal level. On the other hand, there is the fallibilism of sympathetic knowledge –and of knowledge in general, from a pragmatist point of view– as a condition to achieve the above-mentioned refinement.

2) Beyond the specific conclusions we drew from Addams' analysis about the Pullman strike and the "newsboys", the overall lesson to be learned is that the problems generated by the difficult exercise of sympathy become pragmatically unsolvable in the absence of a shift from individual ethics to social ethics. This shift opens the possibility of processes of correction and reconstruction of sympathy through horizontal relations. In this sense, Addams is not asking for a mere quantitative enhancement of sympathetic processes. Rather, she is asking for a much needed improvement in quality, which can be provided only by a social sympathetic knowledge.

3) There are at least two senses in which Addams' discussion of sympathetic knowledge is profoundly realistic. First, her plea for sympathetic knowledge is not the expression of an abstract ideal, nor is it the setting of a pure normative standard, for it is not possible to establish a universal moral criterion, independent from current experience and universally valid for every generation. Rather, the shift from an individual to a social perspective is grounded in the possibilities opened by the radical social changes occuring in the US during her life. In that specific social and political context, there is nothing more *unrealistic* and idealistic than to fight injustice and urgent social issues (both personal and collective) with the obsolete tools provided by individual ethics. This is precisely why, according to Addams, "[t]o attain individual morality in an age of demanding social morality, to pride one´s self on the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment, is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation." (1964, 2–3). Second, Addams was realistic in her views regarding both the necessity and the vulnerability of sympathy. It is unrealistic to expect reason alone to handle all the moral, epistemic and political work required to achieve justice and democracy. Yet, sympathy in itself is not enough; it needs to operate together with social cooperative inquiry and the institutionalization of findings and proposals, as seen in the case of the US law banning child labour promoted by the Child Labor Committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (chaired by Addams herself).

As a final remark, even though we focused almost exclusively on *Democracy and Social Ethics*, there are good reasons to extend the validity of our reconstruction of the idea of sympathetic knowledge to other important works by Addams. For instance, her analysis on the "Devil Baby" case, as it appears in *Twenty Years at Hull House* and in *The Long Road of Woman's Memory* (Addams 1916), shows a) Addams' capacity for correcting and re-articulating her initial lack of sympathy for the migrant women who believed in this folk story; and b) the role of the study of folklore and of popular literature as powerful tools allowing us to imagine the situations out of which this legend arises, leading us to adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards people who believe in it.[16] This is of greatest importance because, for Addams, there is a strong link between sympathy and imagination and, therefore, between imagination and democracy; "[...] much of the insensibility and hardness of the world is due to the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people." (Addams 1964, 3). In this sense, it would appear, much work remains to be done.

There still are, then, different crucial points to be addressed. In any case, we see Addams' work as a living testimony to both the necessity and the difficulties, but also the possibilities contained within a socially framed and democratically controlled use of sympathy.

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[16] On the role of literature and cultural products in the development and refinement of sympathy, see Whipps (2019). An insightful reading of this topic can be found in Marilyn Fischer, "Trojan Women and Devil Baby Tales: Addams on Domestic Violence", in Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010). For a recent, exhaustive and penetrating analysis of Addams and the baby devil legend. see Tullio Viola, "Memory, Folk Narratives, and Social Critique: Notes on Jane Addams and the "Devil Baby" Legend", *Journal of the Philosophy of History, 17*(2) (2003): 328-348.

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