**The Dance of Harmony and Chaos**

In a world riddled with chaos, the prospect of harmony stands as a form of aspiration. Can we imagine a society where coexistence and mutual understanding are not just ideals but realities? A vision like this has for a long time been upheld by communities and nations, yet its true attainment often seems as distant as the stars. Harmony in the grand symphony of human existence plays the role of a silent conductor, orchestrating a delicate balance between diverse voices, beliefs, and actions. This idea is timeless and deeply rooted in the thoughts of human existence. Harmony, in its essence, extends beyond mere peaceful coexistence; it is an equilibrium that empowers individuals and communities to thrive amidst their differences. In the early 19-20th century, the pragmatist philosopher Jane Addams embodied this ideal through her work at Hull House, though it was at its infantile stage, it became a road map towards a better society. Hull House in 1889, Jane Addams made the nation’s first settlement house in a community in Chicago that was very poor. Hull House offered a range of services, including practical educational programs, childcare, and assistance to poor immigrants in settling in the United States. The idea of hull house was to help build community by cultivating useful skills for the betterment of their community. The house was really a hub for the community politically for social change through understanding each other’s experiences, and helping people implement into society. This essay will interrogate the possibility of harmony, by drawing upon Jane Addam’s ideals of sympathetic knowledge, the intrinsic value of all experiences, and the necessity for a leap of love to care. By weaving together these threads, I will explore the contention that a harmonious society is not an unattainable utopia. Instead, it requires an unwavering commitment to empathy, an appreciation for life’s diverse experiences and a dedication to love that goes beyond surface engagement.

**Main Argument**

1. Sympathetic knowledge is necessary for harmony.
2. All experience is worth it, directly, or indirectly.
3. A leap of love is required to care.
4. Therefore, for a society to achieve harmony, it must value all experiences and invoke a leap of love to sympathetically understand.

**Premise 1. Sympathetic knowledge is necessary for harmony.**

Jane Addams advocated for a very interesting idea, that mixed knowledge and ethics together, it is called Sympathetic knowledge. Sympathetic knowledge is an empathetic push to gaining knowledge and understanding of societal issues through direct experiences and engagement with diverse communities. She believed that true empathy and moral insight came from immersing oneself in the lives and experiences of others, especially those from different social economic, or cultural backgrounds. "To follow the path of social morality results perforce in the temper if not the practice of the democratic spirit, for it implies that diversified human experience and resultant sympathy which are the foundation and guarantee of Democracy.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Here she’s saying that sympathetic knowledge shapes individual and collective behavior, it becomes necessary in a democracy. I want you to imagine a workplace empowered by a labor union to understand this concept of sympathetic knowledge.

The UAW (United Automobile workers) is a union for workers in the car, aerospace, and metal industries. During the UAW strike, President Sean Fain (president of the UAW union) criticized that automakers were prioritizing profits over workers. He shed light that while these companies made substantial profits, a significant portion was spent on executive salaries, dividends, and stock buybacks, rather than improving worker pay and conditions. Despite rising living costs and inflation, before and after covid, worker’s wages remained stagnant. Because of this there was a call for fair wages, cost of living adjustments, retirement security, and more paid time off. This union recognized that the CEOs of the automakers were accused of being out of touch with the realities of their workers. For instance, Stellantis CEO Mark Steward was criticized for dismissing workers demands for fair compensation while reportedly vacationing in a luxurious setting. The last 10 years, the big 3 made 250 billion dollars, but instead of investing in the workers, the workers who do the labor, they foolishly give it away to rich investors and CEO’s. “In the last four years, the Big Three spent about 16 billion collectively on special dividends, stock buybacks, and supercharged CEO salaries. That’s billions of dollars lavished on shareholders and executives rather than the workers who make these companies run.” (Sean Fein)[[2]](#footnote-2) “We have been breaking our backs, while the big 3 have been breaking the bank.” (Sean Fein) Mark Steward, got a 40% pay increase in the last 4 years while the workers wage stagnant, and live paycheck to paycheck. Mark Steward, a singular individual, makes 30million a year. Sympathetic knowledge through this union realized the nuance and wage disparity through actively socially working together, to understand one another and, recognized together that enough is enough and began striking. Theres a story where Mark Steward was in his 2nd luxury home while saying that the demands of the UAW strike were unrealistic. These demands that were “unrealistic” are now part of their contract. They got an immediate pay increase of 11% and a 25% pay increase over 4 and a half years, it let workers have the top wages they can get at 3 years over the previous 8 years, increased 401k contributions, protect their right to strike over plants that close and higher starting wages. This strike lasted 6 weeks. Sympathetic knowledge was required to create the union, and have the union work together in their shared chaos to get to a more harmonious place as a UAW worker. Sympathetic knowledge is key to incremental change in society. The battle in sympathetic understanding is recognizing your communities and your own collective chaos, so you can work together to address it in a harmonious direction. To further understand sympathetic knowledge, I want to share another story.

A story by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, called “The Silent Partner,” captures this chasm between CEOs and workers, mirrored from the UAW strikes. The protagonist, Perley Kelso, an upper-class woman, inherits her father’s share in a textile mill. Her attempts to engage with the mill’s operations are met with resistance due to prevailing sexist norms. However, Kelso forms an interesting relationship with Sip Garth, a mill worker. This relationship, initially strained by their differing social standings and prejudices, gradually evolves. Kelso’s interactions with Garth and other workers bring her face to face with the harsh realities of their lives, enhancing her understanding of their struggles, although her influence remained constrained due to her status as a partial owner. Kelso’s admission, “I am not used to people who live as you do, I presume I do not understand how to treat you.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Highlights an important disconnect of the privileged from the worker’s realities. Phelps building this bridge began to sympathetically understand. Especially as Garth remarks, “They don’t know none of ‘em know. That’s why I hate your kind of folks, it aint because they don’t care, it’s because they don’t know nor they don’t care enough to know,”[[4]](#footnote-4) This sentiment echoes in the UAW strikes, where CEOs were starkly out of touch with their worker’s plight, necessitating a union driven awakening to have their voices heard.

This shows the importance of genuine interaction of sympathetic understanding across hierarchical divides, especially in the workplace. “One of the trappings of wealth is greater selectivity in whom one knows and cares about,”[[5]](#footnote-5) This really sheds light on the importance of the isolation experienced by many workers who can’t directly communicate with those at the top. This especially rings true in the context of the UAW strikes, where collective action was essential to amplify workers voices to a level where CEOs could no longer ignore them. The UAW strikes were significant not just for their outcomes but also their demonstration of unity through sympathetic knowledge of one another, to be able to understand one another so deeply for a collective response to corporate indifference.

I want to end this premise by saying that unions are an evolution to the workplace. In the US today only 11% of workers are represented by a union. Without unions, workplaces become a form of monarchy, and become the very thing our forefathers sought to escape. Unions fix this by adding democracy in the workplace, giving the worker’s power to ward off injustices. Unions are a step towards our true goal as a United State, the goal of a government “of the people, by the people and for the people.” (Abraham Lincoln) I want those to acknowledge, acts like union busting prohibit these movements to control individuals out of greed. Unions become a thing when we sympathetically understand each other to recognize the chaos of our situation, to fix wage disparity and/or workplace conditions to ultimately protect each other from unfair practices. Harmony comes when we work together to fight chaos. Because we know… Chaos Begets Chaos.

1. Sympathetic knowledge requires an individual to understand and share the feelings or experiences of another.
2. Understanding and sharing the feelings or experiences of another lead to a deeper and more accurate comprehension of their situation or condition
3. Harmony requires sympathetic knowledge.
4. Therefore, harmony requires understanding and sharing the feelings or experiences of others, leading to a deeper and more accurate comprehension of their situations or conditions.

**Premise 2. All experience is worth it, directly, or indirectly.**

Our experiences weave together to form an enigmatic fabric, that encapsulates the entirety of human existence. The philosophy of sympathetic understanding is rooted deeply in the reservoir of empathy and compassion, mainly because it provides a lens through which we can perceive, digest, and connect with the myriad of experiences encountered by individuals. Jane Addams is recognized for these nuances and gentle approach to social reformation. She Deeply understood the roots of poverty, labor rights and urban improvements and strategically used narrative methods to show the experiences and stories of the underserved. Her idea of sympathetic understanding showed an empathy that is not restricted to acknowledging the struggles of others but extends to actively integrating their experiences and perspectives into collective decision making. I will critically reflect about how all experience is worth it, based on jane Addam’s ideas.

To develop a genuine and universally applicable ethical standard in society, Jane Addams teaches us that one must not isolate themselves from experience and realize instead; from an ethical understanding and developmental understanding through mixing and engaging on the common road. That common road is everyone in existence. Where people from all walks of life encounter and navigate through their own various challenges and experiences. “We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by traveling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another’s burden.”[[6]](#footnote-6) This shows the necessity for experience through mutual support, empathy, and understanding, so people can navigate through life’s challenges into harmony together. True ethical and moral understanding come from shared experiences.

All experiences, the good, the neutral, even those that are traumatic or challenging, play a crucial role in fostering sympathetic understanding and driving social change. For example, consider someone who has experienced a great tragedy, such as a survivor of conflict. Their story, while deeply personal and painful, provides invaluable insights into the realities of war and its impact on individuals and communities. This understanding becomes crucial for developing empathy and informing actions that can prevent these forms of conflicts in the future. However, it’s important to recognize that while we can learn from and be moved by the experiences of others, there are limits to how fully we can understand indirect experiences that we personally haven’t lived through. This humility is essential to sympathetic understanding. The survivor experienced the horror directly, while we indirectly experience it. “We all know that each generation has its own test, the contemporaneous and current standard by which alone it can adequately judge of its own moral achievements, and that it may not legitimately use a previous and less vigorous test.”[[7]](#footnote-7) She’s saying here that each generation faces, unique challenges because we haven’t experienced everything that can possibly happen. Our awareness and response to these challenges, informed by both positive and negative experiences, contribute to our collective moral progress. By actively listening to and learning from a wide range of experiences, we can better address the issues of our time and work towards a harmonious society, that is why all experiences are worth it. For us to go into harmony we must know chaos, because without the good you can’t know the bad and without the bad you cannot know the good.

Societal progress can be likened to a dance between chaos and harmony. Each step forward into the unknown future is incremental, like a careful dance where every movement matters. Sometimes, the dance is tumultuous, with chaos leading, creating a whirlwind of change and uncertainty. At other times, harmony takes the lead, guiding the dance towards a form of optimal order due to the chaos. This dance is not just a mechanical motion but an emotional journey for the dancers, reflecting the struggles and triumphs of a society striving for progress. In this continuous dance, even the missteps are instructive, teaching us resilience and adaptability, as we all move together towards a more harmonious future.

1. Shared experiences lead to mutual understanding and empathy.
2. Mutual understanding and empathy, cultivated through shared and diverse experiences, contribute to the e establishment of social ethics and collective decision making that takes into account the experiences and perspective of all individuals.
3. Therefore: All experiences, whether directly or indirectly are worth it, because they weave the fabric of shared understanding and empathy to achieve social harmony.

**Premise 3. A Leap of love is required to care.**

Every day for weeks I constantly think. “What is required to truly want to sympathetically care for someone you don’t know.?” The bridge to a person’s soul is difficult, and emotionally a burden to reach sometimes. I turned to Martin Luther King for answers. And he said something interesting. “Men must see that force begets force, hate begets hate, toughness begets toughness. And it is all a descending spiral, ultimately ending in destruction for all and everybody. Somebody must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe. And you do that by love.”[[8]](#footnote-8) I think to myself, “is love the key to wanting to understand someone?” I find myself thinking about the anxiety produced to approach someone, because it is unknown what will happen, and it is nerve racking. What can make me break through that? From this quote I recognized, I was in chaos, I was fearful of what the person would think of me, or if I’ll say something silly. Because of MLK saying chaos begets chaos, I knew my anxiety and that fear I felt, was causing me to socially move away from new people to understand them, this is due to chaos begetting chaos. This suggests that to get out of that fear I had, I should just face it, and truly try to empathetically understand someone even if I’m fearful, because if I don’t face it, I’ll constantly be afraid to do it. To break this chaos, you need love, I finally understood that. This love was rooted for the wanting of harmony as a form of wellbeing for all, through sympathetic understanding. As soon as I started doing this it became clear if you encounter people, you just need to be a good person, to reach their soul. Of course, you do meet terrible people sometimes, but realizing that chaos begets chaos, you just meet them with love, like water to fire. MLK gives us a road map to building bridges to people that are chaotic in some form.

MLK noticed breaking the cycle of hate requires wisdom (hence premise 2), because he understands that the cycle of hate leads to an ad infinitum, that awareness of the ad infinitum of hate, leads to an infinite regress of chaos destroying progress in its tracks for everyone involved. Dr. King shared that the only way to end the cycle of hate is one must learn to love their enemies unconditionally, an agape love. He realized it takes knowledge to do this, he does this by stating how to love your enemies. He suggests “We must face the fact that an individual might dislike us because of something that we’ve done deep down in the past, some personality attribute that we possess, something that we’ve done deep down in the past and we’ve forgotten about it; but it was that something that aroused the hate response within the individual. That is why I say, begin with yourself. There might be something within you that arouses the tragic hate response in the other individual."[[9]](#footnote-9) The first way to love your enemies to Dr. King is to reflect on your bias. The idea suggests that if you don’t reflect on your bias, it can cloud your judgements, hinder empathy, and perpetuate hostility. Essentially by holding bias we dehumanize people, making it difficult to see their worth and humanity. Which can obstruct any attempt at understanding their perspective or personal experiences. Essentially through self-reflection a person can learn to cultivate a sense of humility and self-awareness, which allows us to recognize our own imperfections and limitations.

"A second thing that an individual must do in seeking to love his enemy is to discover the element of good in his enemy, and every time you begin to hate that person and think of hating that person, realize that there is some good there and look at those good points which will over-balance the bad points."[[10]](#footnote-10) This requires love to do, which is the second premise of Dr. King’s way to love your enemy, finding good in your enemy, to essentially give reason to love the form of beauty within them. Essentially by recognizing the good in your enemy you are practicing empathy and striving to understand them as a complex individual rather than an adversary. This essentially creates space for dialogue, reconciliation and a deeper understanding of their motivations and perspectives. By breaking the hate and finding reason to love through the beauty of parts of their soul.

The third way to love your enemies Dr. King suggests is by not defeating your enemies. "Another way that you love your enemy is this: When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, that is the time which you must not do it. There will come a time, in many instances, when the person who hates you most, the person who has misused you most, the person who has gossiped about you most, the person who has spread false rumors about you most, there will come a time when you have an opportunity to defeat that person. It might be in terms of a recommendation for a job; it might be in terms of helping that person to make some move in life. That’s the time you must not do it. That is the meaning of love. In the final analysis, love is not this sentimental something that we talk about. It’s not merely an emotional something. Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all men.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Dr. King aimed to nurture empathy and created opportunity for dialogue and understanding. He believed through nonviolent resistance and love; it was possible to change the hearts and minds of the adversary. Not defeating the person was a sign of dignity and respect towards the individual regardless of their differences. Making decisions on love ultimately is rooted in the goodwill for all men, for the sake of harmony.

Instead with the fourth way to love your enemies, “When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system.”[[12]](#footnote-12) he suggests attacking the systems that nurtured them in that way. He suggests attacking the root systems that made the individual have this hate. In this regard he was addressing the root causes of social injustices and inequalities that contributed to the formation of individuals who perpetuated hate and hostility. He recognized that hatred, racism, and prejudice, were not innate traits but rather learned behaviors influenced by societal structures and institutions.

1. Agape love is a necessary condition to build a bridge to people for reaching harmony and loving your enemies.
2. To love your enemies and reach harmony, it is necessary to reflect on your biases, find good in the enemies, avoid defeating the enemies personally, and instead defeat the systems that made them that way.
3. To love your enemies, you must aim to defeat the harmful systems that nurtured that chaos.
4. Therefore, the only way to truly love your enemies and achieve harmony is through agape love.

This argument incorporates sympathetic knowledge well because it takes love to care to sympathetically understand. It invokes a Leap of love because you shouldn’t attempt to be chaotic because chaos begets chaos. Jane Addam’s herself was very anti-antagonistic, so she would never do ad homonym attacks for the sake of sympathetic understanding because she had to know that type of chaos doesn’t get you anywhere with people while you’re trying to build a bridge.

1. Sympathetic understanding is essential for caring for others, especially those unknown to us.
2. The only way to truly love your enemies and reach harmony is through agape love.
3. Caring for others you don’t know requires a leap of love that is founded on the wellbeing of man and the yearning for harmony.
4. Therefore, the leap of love is a necessary bridge to effectively resolve conflicts and societal issues, fostering harmony.

I think it’s important to note that MLK wanted to attack the systems that nurtured people to be terrible humans. Once you break into their souls as people you can find the common chaos and begin together to attack the cause of the chaos. It seems recognizing a common chaos is essential to building the bridge to harmony. This is exactly what the UAW workers did, they attacked the chaos of stagnant wages, and the income inequality from their leaders.

I think in Jane Addam’s heart she knew that love is required to sympathetically understand. For example, in her writing on “the revolt against war”, she advocates for an internationalistic approach to address the broader human life and experience. She uses the analogy of a mother and her children, “mother who found two children fighting, -- not for any cause which they stated, but because "he did that" and "I did this, and therefore he did that to me," -- that such a woman would say "this can't go on."[[13]](#footnote-13) Which reflects her belief that conflicts should be viewed from a humane standpoint, focusing on collective needs rather than nationalistic disputes. The mother’s nurturing intervention, rooted in love, represents the leap of love, promoting the harmony and understanding of the children and the mother. She took the leap to stop them, and that leap was because of everyone’s self-interest not just her own, but to teach that chaos begets chaos. Thus, leaping to stop them solely for the good will of the souls.

**Conclusion. Therefore, for a society to achieve harmony, it must value all experiences and invoke a leap of love to sympathetically understand.**

Through sympathetic understanding, we must value all experiences, because all experiences of good and bad lead us to harmony. To defeat the chaos, we must understand the chaos. We do this by invoking a leap of love to build bridges between one another to fight against the common chaos of man, into the direction of harmony. The leap of love is important because it is what causes the movement to sympathetically understand, it’s recognizing that chaos is absurd and leaping towards unconditional love knowing you are trying to avoid that ad infinitum of chaos. A quote in relation I enjoy very much that people think a man named Hyacinthe Loyson said, “A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit it.” This illustration using sympathetic knowledge, will lay the foundations for a brighter future for generations that do not exist yet. They too will bask in the benefits of our endeavors, enjoying a quality of life enhanced by the legacy we leave behind. Just as we have benefited from the efforts of those who preceded even us. I want to end this with a hypothetical, imagine 2 countries, one that sympathetically understands and one that does not. Which would strive more? The one that would sympathetically understand would attempt together to understand the collective chaos, into a more progressive direction. While the other will not consider the chaos of the people, and because chaos begetting chaos. It will in turn create more chaos until it becomes a necessity to change or perhaps it will be too late to do even that. We live in a United states where it is a mixture of both. The goal ultimately becomes how we use the systems to teach those to sympathetically understand, to reach some form of optimal harmony together.

**Conclusion**

To conclude this essay, I examined the dance between harmony and chaos, particularly through the lens of sympathetic knowledge, the value of all experiences, and the necessity of a leap of love for true care and understanding. Drawing from the philosophies of Jane Addams and Martin Luther King Jr, we have navigated the complex interplay between individual experiences and societal structures, showing the importance of how empathetic engagement and a commitment to understanding other perspectives are crucial for cultivating a harmonious society. The discussion of the UAW strike served as a modern embodiment of these principles, showing how collective action and empathy can lead to substantial societal change. This essay has not only argued that a harmonious society is attainable but has also underscored the importance of active participation, mutual understanding and love as foundational pillars in this pursuit. By recognizing the inherent value in every individual’s experience and choosing a path of empathy and love, even in the face of adversity, we take significant steps towards dismantling systems of injustice and fostering a more equitable and harmonious world. This is not a utopian dream but a tangible goal that requires ongoing effort, understanding, and, most importantly, a leap of love.

**Afterthoughts.**

As I delved into the complexities of creating a harmonious society, my thoughts often gravitated towards Marxian dialectical materialism, which posits that conflicts arise from material conditions. This perspective resonates with me, particularly as I reflect on the numerous conversations I’ve had with people from various backgrounds. It's apparent that many of their struggles are rooted in material issues like housing, income inequality, healthcare, education inequity, and food insecurity. These are the modern embodiments of chaos that I have come to understand through sympathetic understanding. If we were to hypothetically satisfy all these material needs, our focus would then naturally shift to immaterial conditions, the realm of ideas and intellectual fulfillment. Addressing these immaterial conflicts could represent the final frontier in our quest for societal harmony.

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9. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, jr. Loving Your Enemies Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church  
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13. Jane Addams, "The Revolt Against War," The Survey 34, July 17, 1915, pp. 355-359. Page 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)