

Imperfect Peace¹

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The concept of *imperfect peace* has been gradually forged as an answer to practical and epistemological debates. Our desire for peace leads us to produce theories on its achievement, making it necessary to design specific premises about peace (not directly dependent on violence) and address the issue of peaceful power in an individual, social, and public capacity transforming the world into more just conditions. In this context, the adjective *imperfect* can be understood as “unfinished” or “in process,” because the peace is always relative to conflict and violence.

Through *imperfect peace* we recognize all *peaces*—big, medium or small; individual or group; local or international—and their relationships. The phenomenology of peace is potentially more transparent and evident than ever before, and its practical, semantic, conceptual, and imaginary substance is incredibly profound. By recognizing peace as a constitutive and indissoluble element of social realities, its origins can be traced to the very beginning of humanity, and its evolution can be associated with humanity's history. Indeed, the acts of sharing, learning, socialization, collectivization, association, cooperation, and altruism are all factors forming part of the origin of our species. Such qualities are determinants in the rise and “success” of *Hominidae* and, subsequently, of present-day humans (*Homo sapiens*).

From this perspective, we recognize how humans live in interconnected worlds where *peace* is introduced and becomes a reality: both real worlds (emotional and logical representations that are projected and mediated by the intersubjective) and virtual worlds (potential and imaginary motivations, aspirations, and representations). We can appreciate how peace does not always reveal itself palpably, but stealthily—we could even presume to say jealously, like a fabulous treasure—captured within an infinite number of minor events that often, through erroneous criteria, are not deemed worthy of being viewed as peace. We are also able to appreciate how all of these small—or large—*peaces* form an inexorable and indispensable part of our cultural and existential heritage.

All of the experiences and conceptions that we have previously considered when we wished to recognize peace—negative peace, positive peace, phenomenologies of peace—can help us to form a new perspective, one which includes all the different experiences of peace from a perspective of conflict: everything that leads us to consider the relationships between the different ambits and scales of peace and, subsequently, to consider readapting our methodological, epistemological, and, perhaps, axiological and ontological assumptions. If we take our starting point as identifying the abundant types of peace, the first thing we need to do is to investigate peace's relationships, then, if possible, order and rank them in accordance with how some may affect the others, to ultimately consider them as a

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whole. This allows us to analyze the realities and possibly predict and design them within a prospective work.

Imperfect Peace as a Process.

Under the term “imperfect peace” we can group together experiences and states in which conflicts have been managed peacefully. To a certain degree *imperfect peace* can be regarded as a process between *negative peace* and *positive peace*, between the absence of violence and the preeminence of justice. But *imperfect peace* is also somewhat more transcendental. We wish to bring to light and study all the possible relationships and decisions that exist in situations where conflicts are resolved peacefully and where one party has chosen to satisfy the needs of the other. That is to say, when a person or group acts to satisfy the needs of another person or group, to what extent does this action imitate or condition so that similar events occur? Within this framework, we include causal relationships between different states, regardless of their quantity, quality, direction, or intensity, such as the scale of peaceful regulations; vertical relationships—among elements of different levels—and horizontal relationships—among elements of the same level. *Imperfect peace* is more than just the sum of all these *peaces*: it is a practical and theoretical tool that enables us to recognize, promote, and interrelate them.

This approach also allows us to consider peace as a *process*, an unfinished road. That is how one can interpret Gandhi when he said “There is no road to peace, peace is the road.” It can be no other way: Social and environmental realities are continually “evolving,” as are the forms of conflict. Such peace is not a teleological objective, but rather a presupposition that is both recognized and built from day to day. Understanding of the procedural nature of peace, in itself important for the advancement of the pacifistic praxis, is also upheld by theoretical and epistemological approaches in regard to our understanding of the dynamics of nature and life.

On the other hand, it is important to accept the “imperfect” aspects of our species that live in continuous conflict between the diverse, individual, and social possibilities that are conceivable and available owing to cultural and biological conditions, history or the capacity to feel, imagine, desire, communicate, think, or act. Accepting these determinants and the limitations of our biological, individual, social, and cultural entity, *imperfect* would be equivalent to *conflictive*, while also revealing to us an enormous capacity for productive action, based on the recognition of our parameters of existence,.

This approach enables us to achieve various objectives. It affords us a global, not fractioned, understanding of peace; facilitates access to all its facets; opens up better and greater research possibilities; explains and gives them greater relevance; makes them more accessible; allows a greater promotion of ideas, values, attitudes, and conducts of peace; and serves as a guide on the practice of peace, its enhancement and the advancement of its power.

Far removed from simplistic interpretations of “goodies and baddies,” it allows and obliges us to recognize components (experiences, values, attitudes, etc.)

of peace in the actors involved in conflicts. Finally, “imperfection” allows us to approach the humane, where positive and negative aspects, along with successes and errors, can coexist. *Imperfect peace* is a useful instrument for allowing peace researchers to join the debate and construction of new paradigms to comprehend and shape more peaceful, just, and enduring worlds.

Structural and Imperfect Peace.

Consequently, a major part of the historical and social realities of conflicts can be explained through the different mediations and interrelationships (diachronic, synchronic, etc.) between imperfect peace and structural violence. Actually, we should speak of an “imperfect structural peace” and an “imperfect structural violence,” thereby allowing us to easily understand their limitations as well as the complementariness of their attempts to explain events.

In addition, such a concept affords us a new capacity for mobilization by providing connections to individual, peaceful, and conflictive experiences and realities—links and possibilities not only theoretical but also real. Likewise, they can be projected toward the horizon of positive peace, which takes on new dimensions, closer to “intersubjective”—conflict just like the very subjects of the perception—open, debatable, and much needed visions of communication.

Thus, “imperfect peace” is used to provide an intermediary path between maximalist utopianism and conservative conformism: It is a matter of changing our reality based on our knowledge of human limitations and present scenarios (knowledge provided by the different sciences, forecasting and future studies), yet without having to renounce making plans for the future or having a goal: “Imperfect peace,” although more modest, is still a desirable overall goal (also with a normative dimension).

[See also Conditions of Peace; Conflict Research; Peace Culture; History of Peace, Nonviolent; Peace, Negative and Positive; and Peace Science: Historical Approaches]

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