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Soundings encourages scholars to challenge the fragmentation of modern intellectual life and to turn the best and most rigorous deliverances of the several academic disciplines towards the sterner discipline of a common good in human affairs. *Soundings* aims to publish essays that open disciplines to each other, and it looks for readers who sense in such openings some prospect for greater coherence and amplitude in public discourse.

However, our century shows that there are worse things than a fragmented life, chief among them the disguised violence of false unity and forced coherence. *Soundings* urges upon its authors and readers a happy regard for Whitehead's advice: "Seek simplicity, and distrust it."

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ANNOUNCING

A *SOUNDINGS* SYMPOSIUM

on

MARTHA NUSSBAUM'S *THE FRAGILITY OF GOODNESS*

At The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

October 27 - 29, 1988

Among the presenters will be Martha Nussbaum (Brown University), Gerald Bruns (the University of Notre Dame), Stanley Hauerwas (Duke University), and Bernard Yack (Princeton University). Additional participants will be announced in future issues of *SOUNDINGS*.

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THE SELF-JEOPARDIZING OF HUMAN SOCIETIES AND WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPTION OF PEACE

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IT BELONGS TO the fundamental insights of human civilization that not only individuals are open to injury, are in principle frail and finite, but also that societies and cultures as well are chronically endangered and can pass away.[1] Moreover, the apprehension of both the manner in which human societies are endangered and the manner in which they are threatened with passing away has remained amazingly constant for thousands of years.

Societies and cultures are seen as endangered by: (1) physically violent encroachments of other societies and cultures (above all, war); (2) the physically violent intervention of natural factors (epidemic sicknesses, natural disasters); factors which bring with them a temporary or enduring erosion of the natural surroundings, with the resultant drying up of the food and energy supply (starvation and vanishing resources). One needs only to open the Old Testament and a daily newspaper in order to persuade oneself of the continuity in the apprehension of the fundamental forms of jeopardy in which human societies find themselves.

It is astonishing how clearly the basic structures in the perception of how societies are endangered have maintained themselves over the millennia. This does not take into account, of course, the enormous quantitative and qualitative shifts of the dangers in question. The fundamental perception of how societies are endangered and the way of reacting to such danger remain amazingly constant, whether it be a question of new Assyrian war chariots or of the nuclear arms race, whether it be a question of fear of the plague or fear of AIDS, whether it be a

question of the threatening locust plague and drought or of soil erosion, vanishing natural resources of energy, water, and fish, air pollution, and the death of forests. In the midst of the quantitative and qualitative incommensurabilities of these dangers, one perspective remains constant. In each case, a danger is at issue which threatens the continued *physical* existence, the *physical* survival of many human beings, and consequently calls into question the continued existence of societies and cultures.

This set of facts makes the dangers named above impressive, easily pictured in the mind's eye, and resistant to being relativized. Moreover, those dangers have the following in common: at least in the traditions of Western thought, they readily admit of being seen and represented as coming upon human beings, upon human societies and cultures, *from the outside*. "The enemy" comes from the outside; we therefore post sentries and cannons on the towers or send defensive missiles to meet him. The plague or AIDS comes from the outside; we therefore isolate the sick in settlements outside the city or, as the case may be, avoid not only sexual, but also other contact with high-risk groups. The jeopardizing of our food and energy resources comes from the outside. We therefore not only employ shepherds and scarecrows, but also chemicals to drive back the plague of insects, and we engage in protest against those who cause acid rain.

Paired with these common and simple notions of dangerous situations are the corresponding notions of how to ward off the danger. The measures taken—drawing boundaries, establishing dividing lines, utilizing deterrents, distancing, erecting barriers—are as impressive as they are simple. They are the first, simple, basic reactions with regard to the elementary dangers which jeopardize human societies: dangers which are conceived as *mediated in a primarily physical manner* and as *coming from the outside*.

In the following reflections I do not wish in any way to trivialize or downplay these dangers. Nor shall the simple perception of those dangers and the characteristic, simple models of warding them off be called into question in a blanket manner and abstractly criticized. I should like, though, to suggest in the following that those elementary ways of jeopardizing human societies—ways which justifiably draw so much attention to

themselves—actually represent only a comparatively small spectrum of the factors which lead to the jeopardizing, destruction and extinction of human societies. The simple and impressive concentration on a particular type of danger to which human societies are subject—danger which is *primarily physical* and which *comes from the outside*—and on the corresponding defensive measures results in a certain blindness. Namely, that concentration misses an elementary and complex network of dangers to which human societies are exposed.

In the following, I shall seek to make clear that this network of dangers is to be understood as the *self-jeopardizing of human societies*. This self-jeopardizing of human societies is in itself complex. Our dominant traditions of thought—at least the dominant traditions of the West—have thus far experienced much greater difficulty in perceiving such self-jeopardizing than the dangers, depicted in the beginning of the paper, which could be seen as coming "from the outside." The basic model, the typology, in which are perceived the dangers which threaten continued physical existence and which come from the outside, is admittedly very impressive. Nevertheless, in the *first part* of my reflections I should like to show that that model is in part insufficient and in part veils the real issue. The problem is that the typology used for the perception both of situations of jeopardy and of their overcoming does not grasp the extent of the danger to human societies. That typology is hardly able to activate the resources currently necessary for reacting to this danger. In addition, because that typology concentrates on extreme cases to the point of capriciousness, it cannot help but come too late, and remains chronically helpless.

In the *second part* I shall take up and unfold the conception of "peace" developed by A. N. Whitehead. I shall demonstrate that this conception provides an improved perception of the dangers to which human societies are exposed and to which they expose themselves. It could therefore permit the development of more demanding and farsighted ways of guarding against conflict.

The Self-Jeopardizing of Human Societies

Naturally, civilization has not been blind to the fact that human societies are not only endangered from the outside, but

also jeopardize themselves. Already in the early traditions of the Old Testament, the self-jeopardizing of society is realistically recognized and described with regard to the legal system. The perversion of the law and the use of the law to the detriment of the poor and the weak is recognized as a factor which leads to society's jeopardizing and destroying itself. With a logic which we today have difficulty following, early Old Testament traditions connect this self-imposed threat to society with the danger which threatens society "from the outside" in the form of war, natural disasters, or starvation. I shall come back to this connection between the danger to which society is exposed and the danger to which it exposes itself. This connection could be of considerable importance in understanding the paramount significance of the conception of *justice* in the Biblical traditions.

In our day, the fact that human societies jeopardize themselves is all too clear in view of the pollution and destruction of the physical environment. Of course, even in these instances, there are attempts to externalize the causes of danger. Thus we know, above all from the mass media, many strategies of rejecting demands for reform. We know the posturing phrase "You too," and the empty claim, "The others are even worse." We are also familiar with the combination of rejecting demands as unreasonable with the strategy of buying time: "First the others have to . . .," or "First the changes must be financed"—which of course means nothing other than that for the time being we want to keep on doing as before.

Yet in the midst and in spite of these rhetorical public efforts, it remains obvious that the natural, physical and ecological jeopardizing of human societies is also—and with regard to the great industrial nations is even essentially—a form of self-jeopardizing. This is an important, albeit all too obvious, observation.[2] It leads, if it is not further unfolded, to amazingly few consequences. Those who wish to avert these self-imposed dangers by imputing guilt and launching moral appeals fail to recognize this fact. The moral threat to withdraw respect and break off communication can be very effective in person-to-person communication. With regard to the self-jeopardizing of *society*, however, that venture proves to be problematic, even futile.

It is totally hopeless, merely attesting to an unrealistic relation to the surrounding world, to enter the lists against society as a whole or against the economic system, armed only with imputations of guilt and the attendant moral reservations. Faced with society as a whole or with the economic system, moral sanctions, ostracism, and the breaking off of communication are illusory. Only in individual, extreme cases might this set of instruments provoke some disquiet and more or less fortuitous and incidental changes. On the contrary, for the diagnosis and treatment of situations where society jeopardizes itself, simple imputations of guilt and the connected moral appeals are inadequate. It is a logical development that in recent years, a communications form has established itself in our societies which goes beyond moral posturing. In *quasi-liturgical forms of lament* (in which accusation and self-indictment usually mix), the ways in which society endangers itself are listed and more precisely defined: in the ecological realm, for example, air and water pollution, destruction of the ozone layer, soil erosion, death of the forests, pillaging of natural energy resources and fish reserves, etc.

Only, however, when one asks oneself why moral appeals and ritualized public lament enjoy so little success does a recognition of the more profound forms and of the extent of the self-jeopardizing of present human societies begin to emerge. Consider the not only well-intentioned but also supremely justified reactions to society's placing itself in ecological jeopardy. Why do they provoke reactions which are relatively few and diffuse, and whose repercussions are in any event tardy and halting? Why is the so-called public consciousness so difficult to influence? Why is it even more difficult to initiate political processes which work against the chronic distress? Why are legal measures which would actually alter the situation as decisively as is required in order to avert self-imposed danger and destruction even rarer? Why are corresponding economic measures downright improbable?

In his recently published book *Ecological Communication: Can Modern Society Adapt to Ecological Jeopardy?*, Niklas Luhmann has tried to explain the difficulty of calling forth appropriate reactions to ecological jeopardy. He suggests that in modern, functionally differentiated society, the subsystems of economy, law,

science, politics, religion, and education have formed their own networks of codes and programs, which are *reciprocally stabilized.* These "functional systems cannot substitute for each other. They can neither replace each other nor even ease each other's burdens . . . Politics cannot assume the place of science, science cannot assume the place of law—and so forth in all relations between systems. The old multifunctional institutions and morals are thus dissolved. In their place comes that correlation of specific codes to specific systems which distinguishes modern society from all its predecessors."[3]

The possibility of these differentiated functional systems engaging in common action is thus called into question. To be sure, in specific cases, in precisely coordinated ways, they can indeed work together by providing impetus for one another: "On the basis of the results of *scientific* research, by means of a *political* decision concerning limitations of *legal* liability, the construction of atomic energy plants has been made *economically* possible."[4] As a rule, though, the possibility is excluded that they react *in toto* to the cumulative effects of their working together. That is, they cannot react immediately and concertedly, according to a simple model of action and reaction, to the dangers for society as a whole arising from their working together.

Each of them respectively assumes a specifically differentiated function for the whole society. Thus they do not present *a communications continuum,* but rather are always simultaneously engaged in self-preservation. In each of its operations, a societal subsystem constitutes and confirms itself, demarcates itself either explicitly or implicitly from other subsystems, gives the lie to the picture of a simple, encompassing communications continuum.

Common sense, blind to the extent to which modern societies endanger themselves, underestimates this brokenness of the communications continuum. For example, common sense makes the assumption—open or latent—that in all functional systems it is, after all, human beings, rational beings, who are at work. Their joint efforts should be able to work through, to remove, to withdraw the problems and dangers which they jointly have caused. Starting with this assumption, common sense tries to proceed with moral appeals or lamentations

against the self-jeopardizing of society. What common sense thus achieves is, in the first instance, an excitation of the public mood. This excited mood, variously broken by the dams of the various functional systems, melts into a diffuse mood of general alarm, which then at best ebbs away in a process of political communication.

It is with the greatest pessimism that Luhmann reacts to all notions that conventional moral appeals could give rise to concerted reactions or even concerted actions with regard to the great ecological dangers of our day.[5] Only in comparatively few cases does this form of society's alarming itself achieve an effect which reaches to the legal or economic system. As a reaction to acute or chronic danger, it is much too little, too late.

Luhmann describes this state of affairs as the inability of public moral communication to evoke *specific resonances* in the functional systems of society. Public moral reaction to society's placing itself in jeopardy fails to make contact with the specific networks of codes and programs of the particular functional systems and fails also to call forth reactions specific to the respective systems. Instead of evoking some resonance in the functional systems, public moral reaction mostly generates in them, as Luhmann puts it, only a disturbing "noise." Even when public moral reaction succeeds in generating resonance rather than mere "noise" in a subsystem, that is still a far cry from guaranteeing a common reaction or even a common change of orientation on the part of the different functional systems. For in every one of their operations, the functional systems are also engaged in self-preservation, and demarcate themselves one from the other.

Luhmann is convinced that one must continually reckon with the fact that the interests of self-demarcation and self-preservation of the functional systems take priority over the perception even of interests which are obviously sensible for the whole society. To take a fictional example, consider a regulation in Germany which would immediately introduce catalytic converters for automobiles and speed limits on the highways. It would be a *legal* regulation, *politically* prompted and *scientifically* demonstrated to be ecologically sensible. However, in the long run it could lead *economically* to a massive letting go of workers in the automobile industry, which seeks to offer cars which are as

cheap and as fast as possible. This could lead to *political* repercussions for the ruling party. It would lose the next election. Faced with that threat—so the tacit political calculation—it would be better for the Germans to continue to drive like crazy on their *Autobahns*, and let the forests die.

That is, of course, a simplified model. Nevertheless, it illustrates well that resonances in one subsystem can influence other subsystems in ways which the latter perceive as disturbances, and thus fear and seek to prevent. On many sides, then, society obstructs really profound changes of its operative structures.

Modern functional differentiation, which has let loose an enormous dynamic of societal development, thus proves that it must not be underestimated as a way in which society puts itself in jeopardy. On the one hand, modern society is no longer regulated by means of a common metaphysical or moral code. On the other hand, the rules of the multiperspectival, concerted reaction of its subsystems are still hidden to it. Thus there is currently a dearth of possibilities for accurately influencing or recalling the complex developments to which the society has given rise.

Luhmann has taken the institutionalized self-jeopardizing of society by means of the functional differentiation of its subsystems and subjected it to an analysis which is sharp and free of illusion. Yet what prevents society from perceiving in all clarity the briefly characterized conditions? What prevents a clear consciousness of the problematic situation?

If I am not mistaken, insights such as these are concealed by an achievement wrought by modern society which has come to seem almost as natural to us as the air we breathe. At issue is an achievement which continues to nourish the illusion that we could, by the direct application of moral enlightenment, avert the self-jeopardizing of society. This achievement is the *public sphere generated by the mass media: more precisely, the public sphere which is in part fabricated, in part generated and molded by the mass media*.

The conception and representation of reality by the mass media is highly selective. Likewise, the public sphere produced and assumed by the mass media is a fragmentary, and in part fictional, construction. With the lovely, quasi-liturgical formula

of Walter Cronkite, we assume and accept with regard to a set of themes put together by the mass media that "that's the way it is, August the 6th, 1988." We further assume that everyone likewise assumes and accepts this. The fact that we work with assumptions does not mean, however, that we could simply distance ourselves from the communications form thus given. It does not mean that we could simply distance ourselves from that assumption concerning reality and from that public sphere in favor of a truer representation of reality and a more realistic, more authentic public sphere. Despite the reputation and the half-fictional character of mass media communication, there are most likely no societal communications media today which do better than the mass media in mediating with each other objectivity, rapid attainment of plausibility, and power of integration. And no societal communications medium today is as sensitized to react quickly and with integrative power to the physical forms by which society places itself in jeopardy—be they wars, epidemics, natural disasters, or industrially induced ecological crises and catastrophes.

Nevertheless, the really *transformative effect* of mass media communication is minimal with regard to dangers to which society is exposed and to which society exposes itself. To be sure, a television report can launch or terminate a person's career. But up to the present it has been too much to ask of mass media communication to expect it to function as an instrument of long-term, purposive, structural changes of societal subsystems, or even to guide concerted reactions to, for example, ecological dangers. Mass media communication draws its life from the rapid change of themes and the rapid attainment of plausibility. It selects its contents according to their entertainment value within the framework of a latent liturgy. We are very far removed from a daily societal analysis which, with its firm, steady parameters, would be comparable to the weather report.

Our cultures, though—if not the mass media themselves—aim in principle at the attainment of such parameters. This is documented by publications such as the "State of the World" Report, published beginning in 1984.[6] Such publications evaluate widespread mass media information from specific, guiding points of view: with the "State of the World" Report, the point

of view is that of "Progress Toward a Sustainable Society." In the realm of theology I see John Cobb's efforts to develop systems of measurement for the determination of "quality of life" as important and urgently necessary steps in view of this development.[7]

The "State of the World" Reports do present objectifications of the self-relation, mediated by the mass media, of large societies such as the USA or even of an assumed world society. Yet neither these objectifications, nor the best attempts begun by our ethical, politico-theological thought, have yet made available guiding points of view for mass media communication itself. In my opinion, no means has yet delineated itself for transforming the mass media's representation of reality and formation of the public sphere in such a way that a communications continuum would in fact emerge which would allow us to act in response to the dangers to which society exposes itself.

The task at hand presents itself as a very difficult one, as soon as one gives note to even the minimal conditions of its execution. The societal self-centering which occurs through the mass media draws its life from short temporal systems, and lives with short, observed temporal systems. *Only on the basis of short, controlled temporal systems can the fiction of the unity of a universal public sphere be maintained.* Only in the *first* reactions to catastrophes can a certain unity of the public sphere be assumed.

It is easy to require abstractly that mass media communication's shortness of wind be overcome, that we again construct broader temporal horizons, etc. Yet we would thus not even come close to transforming into reality the mass media's fiction of the unity of a universal public sphere. Rather than transforming the fiction into reality, we would destroy it.

To be sure, there is no question of making our peace with the mass media's conception of reality, and with the fiction of the unity of a universal public sphere. We cannot make our peace with that conception, even if it promises to enable a modest continuation of our moral and metaphysical attitudes of consciousness. I should not like thereby simply to strike up a lament over the decomposing of "history" by means of the societal self-centering which occurs through the mass media. This decomposition is indeed the case. The self-centering which occurs through the mass media does indeed dissolve attachments to and cultivation of tradition. It also dissolves a far-reaching culture of expectations with complex normative structures.

What is most lamentable, though, is the lack of effective power of a public sphere whose integration is "post-historical" and "post-natural law," a public sphere which lives "from one day to the next." For neither does the public sphere generated and molded by the mass media control modern society's differentiation of function and perspective, and overcome the danger connected with this differentiation. The communications continuum represented by that public sphere is largely illusory. Nor does the attention span of the mass media correspond to the real difficulties as they are experienced in the real public spheres. The assumed reality continuum presents an unrealistic picture.

On the one hand, the consciousness of the actual consequences and of the *gradated* real reactions is tuned out. Think only of the short-lived media reactions to the destruction of nature (the Rhine) by European chemical concerns in 1986, with the not yet foreseeable consequences of that destruction. Or think of the destruction of *future history* by actions such as the bombing of Libya. In both cases it is a question of events, the burden of whose consequences lies fully outside of the sensitivity of the mass media. On the other hand, mass media communication permanently strengthens and scatters stimulations which cannot be removed, but also cannot really be taken up and processed. Mass media communication thus contributes to continual pollution of the psychic and cultural environments.

Today's society is jeopardizing itself in manifold ways, by mechanisms which enable society to develop at breakneck speed and to accommodate itself continually to that development. Society is jeopardizing itself through functional differentiation, and through the self-centering, the conception of reality, and the formation of the public sphere which come about through the mass media. Society is jeopardizing itself by the fact that its own real development, which society itself has caused, increasingly diverges from the perception and representation of that development. Society is jeopardizing itself by the disappearance of its ability to react to dangers and catastrophes which rebound massively upon society.

The fact that human societies endanger themselves by means of the very achievements which determine the dynamic of society's development, which constitute, so to speak, society's "strength," is a phenomenon which Whitehead's conception of "peace" enables us to comprehend, to analyze systematically, and to examine with an eye to alternatives.

Whitehead's Conception of "Peace"

In the last section of *Adventures of Ideas*,[8] Whitehead considers "those essential qualities, whose joint realization in social life constitutes civilization. . ." These are, in his opinion, "Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art" (284). Whitehead then seeks to determine the factor in human civilization which prevents the striving after "Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art," the striving which characterizes civilization, from becoming "ruthless, hard, cruel" (284): "We are in a way seeking for the notion of a Harmony of Harmonies, which shall bind together the other four qualities, so as to exclude from our notion of civilization the restless egotism with which they have often in fact been pursued. 'Impersonality' is too dead a notion, and 'Tenderness' too narrow. I choose the term 'Peace' for that Harmony of Harmonies which calms destructive turbulence and completes civilization" (285).

The mere introduction of the conception of "peace" in *Adventures of Ideas* is not yet satisfactory. Whitehead's *first step* in describing peace initially seems to allow itself a paradox. On the one hand, he says that peace is "a broadening of feeling." On the other hand, he says that the "first effect" of peace is "the removal of the stress of acquisitive feeling arising from the soul's preoccupation with itself" (285). Whitehead envisages a remarkable loss of self on the part of the person or other subject who experiences and shapes peace: peace "results in a wider sweep of conscious interest. It enlarges the field of attention. Thus Peace is self-control at its widest,—at the width where the 'self' has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality" (285). One can of course praise that conception as "integration of integration and disintegration," as "unity of unity and diversity," as "synthesis of the definite and the indefinite" etc. But this still remains on the level of a merely problematic task or a paradox.

The *second move* seems to be even more discouraging. Whitehead rejects what I would call trivial self-relations, self-sensitivities and trivial self-preservation.

In order to unfold Whitehead's conception of peace, one must grasp the extent of trivial self-relations. Persons, societies, and cultures are still relating to themselves in a trivial way when they use "already perfected ideals" to guide their self-orientation and self-preservation. Persons and societies which seek to guide their self-orientation and self-regulation by means of fixed, already perfected ideals have a trivial relationship to themselves. They do not explicitly take into account their own changes and the changes of their surroundings. Whitehead suggests that such cultures become insipid and suffer "a slow paralysis of surprise." (One could supplement Whitehead's point by saying the same of the corresponding characters, which become shallow.) "And apart from surprise, intensity of feeling collapses" (286).

Those cultures, those societies or persons which continue to use a structure proven in the process of self-preservation and self-development are subject to the creeping loss of their ability to let themselves be surprised. They are subject to the creeping loss of their intensity of feeling. The depth and breadth of their experience shrink; they themselves wither away—albeit on a high level. Their world becomes smaller, poorer, more meaningless.

Whitehead's conception of peace stands in opposition to this atrophy, which lies in optimalized, proven self-continuation. It thus suggests anything but defensive preservation. Whitehead's conception of peace suggests the profound danger of self-jeopardizing contained in the apparently optimalized mechanisms of self-preservation. His conception of peace stands in opposition to the creeping self-destruction that results from centering upon self, from short-sighted and veiled forms of egoism, from fixation upon ideals which are no longer being dynamically developed.

Whitehead also characterizes "peace" as "intuition." This intuition does not let its temporal and experiential horizons be dictated by self-centered sensitivity. Its grasp is not limited to that which immediately concerns me or a society. Nor does it grasp only that which could concern me or could concern a so-

ciety, according to all rules of computational projection and to anticipation relative to one's own identity. The intuition in question does not confine its measurement of experience and of that which can be experienced to the degree, calculated in advance, to which the experience affects the experiencing subject. That in itself would fix a much too narrow conception of the experiencing subject and a much too narrow world. Although the fact that we pass away and the world changes would seem urgently to require such anticipation and determinations, the intuition of peace goes beyond that: "Peace is then the intuition of permanence." That is: "As soon as high consciousness is reached, the enjoyment of existence is entwined with pain, frustration, loss, tragedy. Amid the passing of so much beauty, so much heroism, so much daring, Peace is then the intuition of permanence" (286).

Again that may sound nice for a society which seems to have given up perfected ideals; it may sound like a message of hope for our societies. But on that level Whitehead's contribution cannot yet be distinguished from the cheap ideologies of permanent openness and permanent change. How can Whitehead grasp peace as intuition? How can he say that "Peace is then the intuition of permanence?"

Up to this point, Whitehead's conception of peace is in fact merely a negative concept, which lives in the measure that the dangers of centering upon self are rendered plausible. In terms of content, however, this concept so far points only into empty space, into vagueness.

The *third step* that ends the situation of paradox and the impression that the concept only leads into empty space, into vagueness is taken in Whitehead's description of sacrificial love which cares for others, as between parents and children or between (marriage) partners. Whitehead characterizes this love as "the love of self-devotion *where the potentialities of the loved object are felt passionately as a claim that it find itself in a friendly Universe*" (289; original no italics).

In this perspective of love, the identity of the beloved and the points of view which guide the development of that identity receive only a weak determination. This happens in order not to work against the process of drawing upon the potentialities of the beloved in a continually more complete manner, the continually more complete concretion of the relative, real world by the beloved. The beloved should unfold him- or herself beyond one's own fixed conceptions; in the beloved, the "harmony of the world" should realize itself beyond one's own fixed conceptions. In continually more complete fashion, the beloved should concretize his or her relative, real world. That is, this world should concretize itself in the beloved.

In the *fourth step*, this view of love raises itself to the conception of peace as soon as this open intuition does not come to rest, does not reach its conclusion, in a determinate, finite concretion, but instead concerns the self-relation and the perfecting of the *world*. The world can encounter determinate events, determinate developments, determinate human beings, and determinate societies in a friendly manner. The world can surround them in friendship; it can serve their unfolding. However, *this can be to the weal or the woe of the world*. Whitehead's conception of *peace* faces the intuition of a friendly relation of the world to an event (or to groups of events or to a person) which favors *the world's* higher development, too. So in the intuition of peace a relation of the world to an event or to a person is grasped that favors the development of that event or person *and through it* the higher development of the world. Thus the intuition of peace envisages conditions and concretions of the world which enter as "an abiding perfection in the nature of things, a treasure for all ages" (291). The intuition of peace grasps developments of events, of groups of events, and of conditions of the world which are positive precisely in the fact that they lead to conditions of the world which favor development in a more complete way than their predecessors.

On the level of this complexity Whitehead's intuition of peace becomes finally clear: this intuition can be grasped as a realistic self-relation of a changing self, a relation to the self in the middle of changing conditions of the world, a relation to the changing self in interaction with a changing world.

At issue is this self-world relation as a relation of the world to itself which favors the world's higher development. It is only with this reflexive relation, which is never *directly* graspable, that that state of affairs is comprehended which Whitehead obscurely also names the "harmonizing of harmonies" (292).

A sense of the *difference of perfections of conditions of the world* guides the intuition of peace. If this intuition emerges, it contributes to and grasps (and should be able to explain) a higher development of harmony. (I or we are now conditioned by a state of affairs and I or we are contributing to a state of affairs that in such and such respects represents a higher development than the past state of affairs with which we interacted.) At the same time, the self-world relation grasped in the intuition of peace is in definite ways open to higher development, although it is a concrete improvement.

It is not a question here of a mere preference for one or another ordering of the world. It is not a question of troubled demands that a particular order win out, be it an order which largely determines one's own existence, or an alternative to which one aspires. The intuition of peace finds expression not in preferences and demands, but in the real carrying out, in the real formation, of life as it is actually lived. Peace is not a mere project, but rather a dynamic experience. It is the experience of having brought and of bringing plural reality to representation of the unity of a world; it is the experience of doing so in oneself and through oneself. This unity of a world is neither a mere ideal nor some rigid synthesis. It is the concrete representation, realized in particular contexts of events, of a world which is, over against its predecessors, more highly developed, more harmonious, more richly and coherently favorable to life. At the same time, it is a representation of a world which points beyond its own relative, already achieved perfection and beauty, and which in itself comprehends and gives shape to its own passing away as preparation of still more consummate conditions of the world.

This conception of peace is not oriented towards defense, demarcation, and blockading, but suggests a creative process. This conception of peace does not aim for mere pacification, for fixation of an achieved condition, but for a dynamic development. This dynamic development is not guided by an abstract, even "highfalutin" ideal, but by the consciousness of conditions of self and world which are lived, experienced, and given shape. As I have been trying to show, what is under consideration here is a realistic self-relation, a relation to the self in the middle of changing conditions of the world.

The relation in question is relatively complex, for *the process of transcendence which lies in the concretion of a relative world is connected to and compared with both prior and subsequent conditions of self and world.* Yet it should not be impossible to envisage conditions of harmony which can be understood as already achieved higher developments of harmony, and which at the same time allow themselves to be transcended: which are, in fact, oriented towards being transcended. If one is able to grasp oneself, one's life world, and one's time in such a process of relative higher development, which is itself open to being transcended, one can also existentially resonate to Whitehead's conception of peace. Such a person, though, can also comprehend in a systematic context, the dangers to which society exposes itself which we have earlier characterized.

To be sure, human societies are always endangered "from the outside" by the constitution of their natural and social surroundings. However, as we saw, human societies are also endangered by themselves, by their own perception and formation of their surroundings. For one thing, this formation cannot exhaust the complexity of their surroundings, with the result that societies exist "below level." In addition, as we saw with the help of Luhmann's diagnoses, functional differentiation can make the formation of society so complex and in need of integration that society acts upon and reacts to its surroundings in a manner characterized by a permanent absence of peace. Society thus becomes incapable of clearly comprehending not only the damages which it imposes, but also its alternatives.

The next large network of self-imposed dangers becomes visible when we inquire after the blueprint of world and self which guides society's exchange with its surroundings. Here we saw that the mass media's fiction of the unity of the public sphere and their short-lived constructions of a world do not yet permit the provision of any realistic means of guiding society and of helping in its orientation. They conceal the recognition of the diffusion of self and world. They continually divert attention from the recognition of this diffusion, and simultaneously make the diffusion's existence a lasting fact.

Whoever takes Whitehead's conception of peace seriously will have to ask where and how, in societies which demonstrate

this high dynamic and readiness for self-dissolution, identities and above all future conditions of the world come into view which preserve the dynamic of development without accentuating the instability, absence of peace, and elusiveness of that development. One could examine, for example, whether the nationalistic realignments currently delineating themselves and the forms of national economic egoism could represent such determinations of self and such conditions of the world. Personally, I have my doubts. However, if one does not want to forfeit the realism in Whitehead's conception of peace, one must defer any hidden moral agenda—as difficult as that is—in carrying out the examination.

This concentration, on the one hand, on a demanding and complex *conception of peace* and, on the other, on theory-guided diagnoses of the *self-jeopardizing of current societies* does not exclude *religious* traditions and their potential for providing knowledge. Just the opposite. The Biblical traditions described the self-jeopardizing of human societies primarily in terms of to the decay of their internal *justice*. They saw the decay of internal justice as being directly correlated with the inability to react adequately to dangers coming from the outside. Conversely, they connected the strengthening and higher development of internal justice with a process of rendering the *practice of mercy* more sensitive and more routine. By the "practice of mercy" I mean turning to those who are weaker, strengthening them, connecting them again to the full, common life. The more sensitive and, at the same time, the more to be expected the practice of mercy is in a society, the stronger the practice of mercy and the challenges which it poses to the development of the legal system are, the more perfect is the internal justice, the greater is the external strength of the society, and the less the society puts itself in jeopardy. I think that one should examine whether the Biblical conception of mercy—as an element of God's law—can still provide a standard and a means of orientation today in the overcoming of the dangers to which societies currently expose themselves, and in the current search for dynamic conceptions of peace which are equal to their task.[9]

I think that there is much to be said for putting it to the test. In fact, I think that the Biblical conception of justice dynamized

by the practice of mercy could represent an important supplement to Whitehead's conception of peace. This conception of justice dynamized by the practice of mercy could help to remove remnants of vagueness and idealism from the Whiteheadian conception of peace. But that points beyond the task which we posed ourselves, which was limited to showing the validity of Whitehead's conception of peace in view of the problem of the self-jeopardizing of human societies.

This notion of peace can cope with a dynamic of development of human societies, a development that is endangered by self-dissolution, unrealistic relations to self and environment, and futile endeavors to regain orientation by turning back to the concrete self or the current state of affairs or to an abstract ideal—be it an ideal that worked in the past or a mere promise for the future. Whitehead's conception of peace offers help, and a critique of all these endeavors. It is helpful because it can unfold an intuition which includes all the one-sided endeavors. Even the self-jeopardizing of current societies can be understood and can be corrected as a highly developed endeavor to reach the level of peace.

Dedicated to Niklas Luhmann on his sixtieth birthday.

NOTES

1. The first version of the text was presented at the Conference On "Process, Peace, And Human Rights" in Kyoto, Japan, May 3-8, 1987. Translation by John Hoffmeyer.
2. Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Ökologische Kommunikation. Kann die moderne Gesellschaft sich auf ökologische Gefährdungen einstellen?* (Opladen; Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986) 31.
3. Luhmann 97. Here, and later, my translation.
4. Luhmann 99.
5. Cf. Luhmann, esp. 237ff.
6. Ed. annually by Lester Brown (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company).
7. John B. Cobb, Jr. "Beyond Political Theology," in *Gottes Zukunft—Zukunft der Welt*. Festschrift für Jürgen Moltmann, ed. H. Deuser, G. M. Martin, K. Stock, M. Welker (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1986) 457ff.
8. New York: The Free Press and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967. The page numbers given in the ensuing text refer to this edition of the work.
9. Cf. Michael Welker, "Security of Expectations. Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel," in *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986) 237-260.