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## **The Non-Substantialistic Turn in Whitehead's Philosophy: Its Meaning, its Limits**

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¶1. In the chapter "Objects and Subjects" of *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead notes that

There is (...) a general continuity between human experience and physical occasions. The elaboration of such a continuity is one most obvious task for philosophy.<sup>[1]</sup>

So, all of Whitehead's philosophy could be interpreted as a reaction against any false dualism, that is to say a dualism appearing by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact.<sup>[2]</sup> For one important function of philosophy should be to elaborate a general scheme which could be exemplified by concrete fact. Whitehead proposes some historical examples of those dualisms:

The dualism in the later Platonic dialogues between the Platonic 'souls' and the Platonic 'physical' nature, the dualism between the Cartesian 'thinking substances' and the Cartesian 'extended substances', the Lockian 'human understanding' and the Lockian 'external things' described for him by Galileo and Newton—all these kindred dualisms are here found within each occasion of actuality.<sup>[3]</sup>

- ¶2. But the major reaction, in my opinion, was against a dualism which would control all the others, namely, the dualism of substance and accidents. We shall first examine this Whiteheadian reaction to what we might call an original dualism. I would like then to establish tentatively that his rejection of the substance/accidents model leads to a reconsideration of the basic structure of the universe. Finally, I will compare Whitehead's cosmology to that of Eric Weil, to argue for a more human-centered view of cosmology, creativity and subjectivity. I shall begin with Whitehead's conception of eternal objects, which, taken as a whole, constitute the starting point of any datum for actual occasions, since:

Each occasion has its physical inheritance and its mental reaction which drives it on to its self-completion.[\[4\]](#)

This reconsideration of eternal objects, as transmitted in this physical inheritance, implies that one should revisit the traditional conception of God, as expressed in Aristotle's metaphysics. Whitehead retains the cosmological function of God. But Whitehead sees him as being, not an ultimate transcendent actuality, giving the world its justification, but rather an exemplification of what should be to him a complete fact. Thus, we shall be able to understand the capacity of Whitehead's metaphysics to define the ultimate coherence of our lives, starting from the world we are living in.

## **1. The Revolt Against the Dualism of Substance and Accidents in Whitehead's Philosophy**

- ¶3. Whitehead considers himself rebelling against the whole occidental tradition, founded on Plato's earlier conception of absolute substances and Aristotle's view of the cosmos as a general network of interrelated substances.[\[5\]](#) The Platonic and Aristotelian predicative pattern makes it possible to characterize substances by common qualities, usually shared by all or several entities. Hence, there is a two-level conception of reality:

Fundamental realities, which conform to the platonic model of absolute ideas, existing as such; Apparent characteristics of those realities, issuing in verbal sentences that present some substantial or accidental, and universal or particular relations to the first-level realities.

- ¶4. Whitehead, as we all know, is contending that such a construction of cosmic reality has become inadequate if we want to take into account the whole reality. For he regards this Aristotelian conception, convenient as it is for the sake of daily life, as an inadequate view of ultimate reality. Indeed, we absolutely need this device to share our impressions with other people. But the recent development of linguistics and logics has shown the traps into which we fall when we give too much credit to the convenient model. I would then like to present Whitehead's conception about dualism, even if it is a well-known topic for my readers.
- ¶5. First of all, we shall examine the Whiteheadian criticism of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, in order to understand his own definition of concreteness, as resulting from the process of concrescence, and to underline the importance of the insistent presence of cosmos for this process.

### **The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness and the Revolt against Dualism**

- ¶6. If we give some credit to appearance as a heap of substances, isolated from each other in presentational immediacy, we fall, according to Whitehead, into a dualistic view of substances and qualities. The mode of presentation is so important for the control of our lives that we automatically fall into the illusory faith that the objects presented are really put together into a unique framework, which we call the world at a first level of truth. Then, every statement about those objects, Whitehead says, will indicate a second-order truth, since it is presupposing a durable relationship between every one of those objects and one or another or all of its qualities. According to this view, there are different levels of enunciation, from objects of first level, considered as a basis for our approach of the world, up to statements which are more or less intricate, with respect to their capacity to reflect determinate states of affairs. Now, if we intend to relate all of those statements in the same coherent framework, we fall into insurmountable difficulties as the authors of *Principia Mathematica* have told us. Whitehead attributes those difficulties to a fragmented vision of reality, divided between substances and their qualities. He was always opposed to any form of dualistic vision, since such a vision lacks the core hallmark of reality, which is presupposed to be coherent and unique. So, if we want this core to be manifest, we must, Whitehead says, change our approach to the world. The so called first level truth, that of the concrete substances, with their linguistic support, could hardly be considered as ultimate, since they are, in themselves, the outcome of an activity, the activity of feeling and knowing the events of the world. The only important question would then be: what is happening in our sense organs, and in general throughout the whole body, so that we are able to characterize a state of affairs with sentences considered as true or false? The whole of Whitehead's philosophy could be interpreted as an endeavor to answer this question.

- ¶7. The response, unsatisfying though it is, could be the following: what we call a 'substance' is really a convenient instrument. But this habit bars any attempt to really understand that our experience is first of all a process. We can be helped, in reaching this fundamental level of process, by the mathematics of the extensive continuum. For continua mathematics proposes a scheme which makes it possible to understand the real structure of the world in terms of process.<sup>[6]</sup> What then is the relationship between this conception of process and Whitehead's conception of concrescence? Is the latter conception more or less appropriate to a metaphysical approach to reality? How is it integrated in the general speculative scheme of, for example, the speculative scheme of *Process and Reality*?

## The Role of Concrescence

- ¶8. At a microscopic level, the process of concrescence could be characterized as a development of prehensions, each of them exemplifying, not any isolated fixed support, but the whole world's creative advance. The perplexity here is to articulate the relationship of the microscopic process to the macroscopic process of the complete evolution of the cosmos, as Spinoza realized when he claimed that a *Deus sive natura* would be the only substance. We shall examine this question in the second part of this paper. Let us now describe what the Whiteheadian process of concrescence looks like, in itself, considered at its microscopic level. It seems to me that this question of the definition of concrescence has remained until now quite unclear. Indeed, according to the explanations that Whitehead himself developed in his *Process and Reality*, we could say that concrescence is an interweaving of primary prehensions, the first of which is physical, and the other of which is as much conceptual as physical.
- ¶9. What then does *physical prehension* mean? It is, I think, a grasping of the whole universe, as it is manifested in the presentational mode of spatio-temporality, at a definite point of the spatio-temporal continuum. This very grasping is in itself a new actuality, which will then be re-grasped by other actualities, emerging from a new definite point of the spatio-temporal continuum. What is transmitted, from one prehension to another is the world, just envisaged from the point of view of the antecedent prehension. Thus, a concrescence is growing up from prehension to prehension, until some quality of the given continuum may emerge, as a defining characteristic of the concrescence, to become a public matter of fact, called by Whitehead its *nexus*. In its turn, this quality may either be attached to the datum, or define the subjective activity itself, particularly in occasions as complex as human moral consciousness.

- ¶10. There is no need to say how important this conception of concrescence has been for the elaboration of Whitehead's new cosmology. But many issues remain unclear, as to the real status of the concrescence. Let me mention some of them, which are classical perplexities one might come upon with this Whiteheadian notion: one concerns the so called "ingression" of eternal objects into the process, another, the way conceptual prehensions articulate physical prehensions, a third, the emergence of the subject, a fourth, the real meaning of the distinction between microcosmological and macrocosmological processes, the fifth, the production of nexus, and the sixth, the appeal to a transcendent entity as a justification of cosmic activities. Of course, all of these issues have been abundantly discussed. But I would like to get back to the crux of those discussions. It seems to me that the most important question about Whitehead's cosmology is the question of a radical and irreducible dualism, between the realm of eternal objects and the location of development of cosmic actualities. In other words, it is the question, which Whitehead himself explicitly raised, of the relationships between the totality of eternal objects and their concretion, between the potentialities taken as a whole and their complete actualization: in terms taken from *Process and Reality's* last chapter, between "God and the World."

### Back to the Perplexing Question of the Dualism of God and the World

- ¶11. The question is then: what kind of reality could make the creative advance effective? Eternal objects as such or divine energy, or both? When reading some chapters of *Science in the Modern World*, such as the chapter "Abstraction," we could think of the cosmos as a unique network of eternal objects. Expressions like 'relation,' 'relationship,' and 'related' occur almost at every line of this chapter. We could reasonably admit that Leibniz's cosmology was present in the background, with his theory of the best of possible worlds. For this best world could be considered, as Whitehead himself says, as a realm, analogous to Leibniz's general theory of the realms of nature and grace. Of course, Whitehead assigns to this world an energy, which he will then consider as a divine and primordial nature. But it is precisely this deviation from Leibniz which could be questioned: the new agency is certainly not a *deus ex machina* which would transcend the world as it is in Leibniz's case. It is subject to the general rules of the world. But it is altogether different from the world on one point, according to Whitehead's conception: its first prehensions, as cosmic occasions, are conceptual and not physical. Therefore, it is difficult to see how this novel agent could be related to the world, since it appears too different from the world. If, on the one hand, we quite understand that, at the macrocosmic level of our body, our thinking activity may emerge from the functioning of this body, how could we, on the other hand, admit the inverted process, i.e. the emergence of this same functioning of our body from a divine conceptual actualization? It seems to me that such a device, though intended to ground our original experience, remains unexplained.[\[7\]](#)

- ¶12. So, we are left with a last couple of entities, apparently irreconcilable with each other. For Whitehead, of course, this state of affairs pertains to the very last duality of reality itself, the contrast between unity and multiplicity[8], which is not a contradiction, but rather a union of opposites.[9] Herein Whitehead anticipates Lovejoy's objections to the revolt against dualism. I think that is the point we should tentatively clarify now: how we could deduce Whitehead's natural theology from this genuine contrasted duality.

## **2. The Articulation of Eternal Objects into Actuality, from a Non-Substantialistic Point of View.**

- ¶13. At the very beginning of chapter X in *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead warns his reader:

In the present chapter, and in the immediately succeeding chapter, we will forget the peculiar problems of modern science, and will put ourselves at the standpoint of a dispassionate consideration of the nature of things, antecedently to any special investigation into their details. Such a standpoint is termed 'metaphysical'. Accordingly those readers who find metaphysics, even in two slight chapters, irksome, will do well to proceed at once to the Chapter on "Religion and Science." [10]

- ¶14. With this recommendation, Whitehead tells us that we must admit as a philosophical possibility the direct transition from positive, particularly historical, sciences to metaphysics, for a discussion about the relationship between the objects perceived and their ultimate foundation. The central notion which is laid down at the very outset of the chapter is that of eternal objects. When we analyze the facts that are weaving our experience, we discover that those facts could be analyzed into two categories of objects:

Objects which form a united world, under the heading of an "infinite abstractive hierarchy."

Objects which together constitute the "vertex" of "finite abstractive hierarchies."

- ¶15. Hence, the whole of this chapter "Abstraction" could be interpreted as an attempt to relate the hierarchies of the second category to the infinite abstractive hierarchy. The infinite hierarchy embraces the totality of eternal objects, which could be actualized at a precise point of the spatio-temporality, whereas the finite hierarchies are constituted by actuality, making an abrupt selection. This concept of abruptness is very central in this chapter, but also in other passages of *Science in the Modern World*, and in *Process and Reality* as well. When an actual occasion is creating its own definition, while emerging from the whole realm of eternal objects, it makes a selection of particular objects, focusing either on a particular series of aspects of the concrete situation, or on particular characteristics of an object's subjective form, such as fear, joy, pleasure, etc. In any case, the process of actuality gives the analysis its basis for further research, either with definite and finite series of concepts, or with a series to be indefinitely broadened up to the totality of the cosmos.[\[11\]](#) But what is the meaning of this distinction? As we shall see, it constitutes, for Whitehead, the best introduction to a real metaphysics, according to Aristotle's meaning of that term. In particular, the concept of God, which is introduced at the outset of the following chapter, seems to be a direct consequence of this presentation of eternal objects.

### The Question of Eternal Objects in Whitehead's philosophy

- ¶16. Concerning the definition of infinite hierarchies of eternal objects in *Science in the Modern World*, we could raise the question of their efficacy: are they active in the constitution of an actual occasion, or simply the abstract result of an analysis of this occasion, carried out afterwards according to its exemplification and by its connectedness?[\[12\]](#) If we pay attention to the meaning Whitehead is giving to abstraction, as opposed to concreteness, we shall see that abstraction could never develop any actuality as such, because there is nothing apart from actuality. The fallacy of misplaced concreteness, which we already met, indicates without any serious doubt that abstractive activity is coming after the actualization has been effective, to recover its characteristics, actively. Hence, it is always a consecutive operation. The effective experience, which is a general presence to the world and a capacity of particular selections by specific synthesis of those eternal objects, appears then to be the "womb" of every analysis of this experience into its basic elements. For

An actual occasion is a prehension of one infinite hierarchy (its associate hierarchy) together with various finite hierarchies. The synthesis into the occasion of the infinite hierarchy is according to its specific mode of realization, and that of the finite hierarchies is according to various other modes of realization.[\[13\]](#)

¶17. Thus, the effective experience, either general or particular, opens the way to that particular operation which we name abstraction, when we intend to discover what the ultimate constituents of that experience are. The principle governing this operation of abstraction is that of the translucency of realization: the same objects can be grasped in the synthesis of actualization and re-appropriated without any change by logical analysis.[\[14\]](#) Our experience, in any form it may be presented, is through and through guided by this principle. What differs is solely the subjective form of actualization, depending on the importance and the level of complexity of that experience. So, even abstraction might be rightly considered in itself as a concrete operation. Now, according to this conception of abstraction, what is the meaning of the following chapter about God? There, Aristotle is mentioned as the founder of a cosmological theology, justly accepted by Whitehead as an example of a sane approach to a cosmic, non-religious God. But Whitehead, unlike Aristotle, envisages God here as the only possible actualization of a double cleavage, namely one:

between the complete realm of possibilities and its concretization (cf. God as The Principle of Concretion and of Limitation);

and

between this concretization and the emergence of a proper focus of temporalization, with its past, its present, and its future manifestation[\[15\]](#),

which will become in *Process and Reality, The Reformed Subjectivist Principle*.

¶18. In order to understand the development of this conception of God, let us first examine this double rupture.

### **The Rupture Between the World as a Complete Realm of Possibilities and a Particular Actual Occasion**

- ¶19. We already met the concept of abruptness, which characterizes any particular selection of eternal objects. It seems to be the most appropriate characterization of this first rupture. It reveals at the same time the importance of the world as a whole and its incarnation into a particular occasion. With an understanding of the chapter "Abstraction", we could say that it clarifies the distinction between infinite vs. finite hierarchies: the decision that constitutes any actual occasion represents some incarnation of the infinite totality of possibilities from which it is emerging, thus authorizing an analysis of this totality. But this linkage between the finite and infinite hierarchies leaves us with some baffling questions. For example, could we consider finite hierarchies as a real expression of the importance of the world, at the level of a simply individual actuality? Could we also consider the infinite abstractive hierarchy as the common ground for the analysis of all the finite hierarchies? Is that infinite abstractive hierarchy itself more than an abstraction, falsely taken as a concrete reality, without any proper life or motion? To appropriately answer those questions, we must now pass on to the discussion of the second rupture.

### **The Rupture Between the Objective Assemblage of Data and its Subjectification.**

- ¶20. Whitehead discusses the problem of this rupture in *Process and Reality* when he discusses *the category of subjective harmony*, as pre-established harmony between those data and the becoming of a subject.<sup>[16]</sup> Of course, one cannot help evoking Leibniz's *Monadology*, since Whitehead himself makes the rapprochement clearly enough on the same page. But is it a genuine similitude? It seems to me that Whitehead's conception of this harmony is based on the belief that everything may enter into the constitution of any subjective activity: between the development of a concrescence and its becoming as a proper subjective activity, there is such a harmony. For example, smelling the perfume of a rose presupposes as an essential condition that there is an accord between such a feeling and the objective data that make it possible.
- ¶21. Thus, for Whitehead in *PR*, this harmony is intimately present in any actual experience. It is not as in Leibniz, superadded and controlled by God, considered as a transcendent reality. For it is well known that in Whitehead's cosmology, God cannot be considered as an exception to the general metaphysical principles. So we may not think of our own experience as being controlled by any transcendent reality. It is, in itself, the sole source of our metaphysics, without any recourse to extrinsic explanation. Therefore, the pre-established harmony could only be a fact that we experience every day. The philosophical point of Whitehead's metaphysics, here, is to assert only the importance of actualized subjective experience for everybody, even at the level of metaphysical activity. The world must be harmonized in itself to be thinkable by everybody. But that does not entail any confidence that this harmony is indicating any presence of a common God, except if one admits to the principle (postulate?) of universal relationality, in which case God should be either the author

or the supervisor, or at least the main exemplification of that relationality.

- ¶22. Now, there is some anticipation of this harmony in *Science and the Modern World*. Noteworthy enough, when Whitehead is discussing Leibniz's organic harmony, at the end of the chapter "Science and Philosophy" in *Science and the Modern World*, just before the chapter "Abstraction", he is referring to Russell's first period, that of his book *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900). Whitehead's objection to Leibniz's *Monadology* is that

he did not discriminate the event, as unit of experience, from the enduring organism as its stabilization into importance, and from the cognitive organism as expressing an increased completeness of individualization.[\[17\]](#)

Whitehead is here making the presupposition of three contrasts, which appear to be all relevant in order to define any pre-established harmony: we must admit first, a distinction between events and enduring organisms, second, a distinction between events and cognitive organisms, and third, a distinction between enduring and cognitive organisms. Even if one admits-an hypothesis which is worthy of discussion—that Leibniz missed the first two distinctions, hence the real pre-established harmony, still, I think he strongly asserted the importance of the last one, with his definition of an harmony between the Realm of Nature and the Realm of Grace. Now, this harmony indicates another reality, which is entirely different from the harmony of Nature, considered as the locus of events: it is the harmony between the father and his sons, such as it is experienced in the world of morality, interpreted as the *City of God*. (*Monadology*, 84 & 86). Even if one admits with Whitehead that the real pre-established harmony must appear through an individual experience, this very harmony should be extended without any discussion to the domain of moral and even religious experience. With this moral experience, we are experiencing a new kind of harmony, which cannot be demonstrated, just displayed.

- ¶23. So we are left with two major perplexities, when discussing the whole chapter of *Science and the Modern World* about abstraction:

The difficult passage from initial data, together forming the world as a background, to the final objective construction of a new actual occasion,

and;

The translucent and parallel transformation of this final construction into a particular actualization, with its own subjective form, which is difficult to think about, though trivially experienced by anybody in every domain of human practice.

Both of those perplexities result from the fact that the harmony is not created, but

only presupposed, by our proper experience, even our moral experience. Being a presupposition for any metaphysical investigation, that harmony justifies at the same time its validity and its limits for a complete metaphysical investigation. So we must now continue our analysis, to attempt to understand the meaning of Whitehead's theological response to this conceptual challenge.

### 3. The Evolution of Whitehead's Conception of God, from Science and the Modern World to Process and Reality

- ¶24. Till now, we have not evoked the Whiteheadian conceptions of God, either that of *Science and the Modern World* or that of *Process and Reality* in themselves, but only in their relationships to the actualities of the world. Nevertheless, the two perplexities that we just mentioned above lead us now to revisit Whitehead's natural theology. My intention is not here to resolve the two difficulties, in order to explain away the relationships between the world and its transcendent origin, but to envisage in what sense Whitehead's responses to those difficulties could be considered as metaphysically meaningful. A first indication of the way we could follow is given by Whitehead's own evolution, specifically between *SMW* and *PR*.

#### The God of Science and the Modern World

- ¶25. As we know, God is characterized in the chapter "God" of *SMW* as The Principle of Concretion, that is to say the principle governing the first passage we mentioned above, between the world as a totality of eternal objects and its fragmented actualization into indefinitely different actual occasions. God is, as Whitehead says at the end of the chapter, conceived as the supreme ground for limitation.<sup>[18]</sup> It is likely that Whitehead would have evoked philosophers such as Spinoza or Leibniz, or Bergson, to give us an illustration of this ground, since those authors are often mentioned throughout *SMW*. But how does Whitehead meet the second difficulty, about the subjectification of an actual occasion? Nothing is said on this question in *SMW*. I think the only anticipation of it was the conception of the triple envisagement.<sup>[19]</sup> It is to be noted that the first mention of this notion is presented about an underlying eternal energy or an underlying activity.<sup>[20]</sup> What is here at stake is the capacity of this energy or activity to be developed in three stages, each of them contributing a real creation of temporality, with its recollection of the past, its realization of the actual present, and its creation of a future for other actualities. The subjective bias is only present in as far as those dimensions of time are discussed.

- ¶26. In the chapter, "God," Whitehead relates a graded envisagement to the abruptness already mentioned. But he is not so clear as before about the three stages of this envisagement. We could say that when his conception of envisagement is clearly presented, it is not related to God, and conversely when he applies it to God, it is not so rigorously presented. So we have in *Science and the Modern World*, as L.S. Ford has analyzed it, some anticipation of *Process and Reality's* views about God, but not yet a definite vision of the nature of God. The only principles that give us a first representation of how Whitehead is thinking of God are the two principles already mentioned of Translucency and of Concretion. According to the first principle, as defined at the end of the chapter "Abstraction", the eternal objects remain absolutely identical during their passage into reality so that they could be indefinitely manifested in other actualizations as well. According to the second principle, this very passage is made possible by the divine aiming at actualization of potentialities. But both principles are still insufficient to take into account the world's aiming at the future.
- ¶27. According to this orientation, the actual occasion has become a lure for other feelings, opening to novel potentialities to be accounted for in the development of creative advance. This dimension of God corresponds to that of the third envisagement, as it is evoked in *SMW*, about the underlying activity:

...the envisagement of the actual matter of fact which must enter into the total situation which is achievable by the addition of the future.[\[21\]](#)

This third envisagement, not yet related to any conception of God, could be compared to the 18th category of explanation in *Process and Reality*, which defines the ontological principle as a principle of efficient and final causation.[\[22\]](#) The actualization of an entity introduces into the world some final novelty. This actuality becomes then an efficient factor of concrescence for novel actualities in the future. It is precisely this ontological principle that will be represented in *PR* by the concept of the superjective nature of God, as we shall see. God is not only the principle of concretion, aiming at the actualization of every potentiality; but he is also, himself, the ontological principle, making it possible to maintain this world as a womb of future actualizations. Let us now examine how the triple envisagement of *SMW*, whose value was limited to the evolution of the actual entities in the world, becomes in *PR* the genuine definition of God, as opposed to and complementary to the world.

## The Clarification of the Conception of God in *Process and Reality*

- ¶28. Very much has been written on the conception of God in Whitehead. The only remark I would add concerns the metaphysical meaning of the shift of vocabulary, in Whitehead's philosophical evolution from *SMW* to *PR*. My point is that Whitehead has not significantly changed his mind about God, between 1925 and 1929. He has simply clarified the expression of his prior intuitions. One of those intuitions is that the world, taken as a whole and not only in its obviously biological elements, is subject to an evolution, which combines the two sides of a given environment and of creativeness.<sup>[23]</sup> This general feature of the world will be presented in *PR* as the category of the ultimate, whose meaning will be clarified with the categoreal obligations, especially the fourth series of categories. Those categories define Whitehead's philosophical attitude when he tentatively sketches the structure of the world.
- ¶29. We could demonstrate how, in the Categoreal Scheme of *Process and Reality*, the second and third series of categories; the categories of existence and the categories of explanation, respectively, give us some clarification of the meaning of Whitehead's God, since they define, in the third series, the set of principles that govern the creative advance, and in the second series, the objects which are constructed on this basis. God appears then to be, as Whitehead says, not an exception to the general metaphysical principles, but their authentic exemplification, since He is the reality "X" on which all those principles defined in the categories of explanation are converging in any coherent actualization. From the principle of unrest, which illustrates the general creative advance of the world, through the principle of relativity, which explains this advance through all the parts and moments constituting the actual world, and to the ontological principle, which exhibits this process in its permanence, the world such as it is at an instant of actualization is saved from perishing by the permanence of God's actuality. Thus, the partition of God into three natures should be considered an exemplification of Whitehead's difficulty in thinking of God as a unique and coherent being: the efficiency of God is altogether that of an origin, of an actualization and of a salvation. He is only efficient through those three moments, which the human understanding must of course distinguish, although they are converging in God on a unique activity.

### Suggestions and Questions about the Natural Theology of Process and Reality

- ¶30. If it is the case that Whitehead's natural theology corresponds to Aristotle's model, those distinctions of three natures in God could be assigned to three fundamental conditions to make the world thinkable. In much the same way that Aristotle does it in the chapter "Lambda" of the *Metaphysics*, Whitehead presents in *Process and Reality*, the unavoidable conditions according to which the world is thinkable. Let us now examine those conditions.

- ¶31. If we consider, with Whitehead, that what does happen in the world could not be understood without the indication of a transcendent reality, then, we must attempt to evaluate the real impact of Whitehead's terminology about God. For example, could one consider the Primordial Nature of God to be just a useful device for a philosophical discussion about the process of the world, qualifying the real potentialities, taken as a whole in order to create novel actualities? If one compares Whitehead's terminology about God in *Science and the Modern World* and in *Process and Reality*, one notices that the primordial nature in PR could be considered as another name for the fundamental energy as it is mentioned in SMW. In SMW, it is a representation, which gives the couple, infinite vs. finite abstractive hierarchies of eternal objects, its real coherence: once one thinks of those hierarchies, one could not resolve the question of their disparity without a confidence in this virtual coherence. Human finitude, which prevents one from characterizing those two series by a definitive concept, appears of course to be an inescapable factor for our understanding of concrete reality. But it also indicates another ideal reality altogether, which Kant called an *intellectus archetypus*, which is not to be wholly reached by our human faculties, since it is only understood by our inherited intelligence, which Kant named our *intellectus ectypus*.
- ¶32. So, the primordial nature of God refers to a transcendent reality, even if this reality is subject, according to Whitehead, to the same definitive metaphysical principles, in much the same way as any other actuality.
- ¶33. In the same way, we could consider that Whitehead's Consequent Nature of God in *Process and Reality* represents a conception issuing from the Principle of Translucency of Realization in SMW, in accordance with the Principle of Relativity in PR. The eternal objects that are passing to their actualization in the world remain just what they are, with their fixed relationships to each other. The realm of eternal objects, Whitehead says in *Science and the Modern World*, is just an extension of the chapter on mathematics, thus becoming the first chapter of metaphysics.[\[24\]](#) The Consequent Nature is just what this realm becomes for all drops of actuality, taken as a whole. But is this consequent nature of God a power which would be able to give, for example, the actuality of a man its effectiveness when he takes his independence as a conscious individual, confronting absolute evil that threatens his freedom? It seems to me that Whitehead is here dealing with Leibniz's perplexity, about a conception of the best of possible worlds. Of course, Whitehead clearly raises this problem in *Science and the Modern World*, though at a more general level.[\[25\]](#) He says that God, being subject to the same conditions as the other actual occasions, could not be considered as the author of evil. But then, what does his caring about the world mean, so beautifully described at the end of PR? If the world is just what it is, why should God pay attention to it? Should God be the only exception to all actuality, the one thing not defined by the combination of precedent potentiality and consequent actuality? If "He be conceived as the supreme ground for limitation,"[\[26\]](#) then He leaves any other actuality entirely dependent on His good will, and hence no longer

atomic in God's actual presence.

- ¶34. This is the fundamental reason why there cannot be any authentic philosophy of an entirely free actuality in Whitehead's cosmology. If the Principle of Translucency of Realization and the Principle of Relativity are true, any actuality is internally determined, even if it is externally free, according to the ninth categoreal obligation. If we follow Whitehead's cosmology, an actual occasion could not get rid of its datum, even when a new actuality is created. There is no such thing as an absolutely free will, which would be considered by Whitehead as a vacuous actuality, expressly denied at *Process and Reality*, p.29, as well as in other places. There is in Whitehead's cosmology no philosophy of actuality apart from a philosophy of potentiality. Hence, the human claim to absolute freedom appears to be just a dream, and the consequent nature of God, as defined in *PR*, is the only possible result of the relationship between potentiality and actuality that could be. Even when he or she wants to assert himself or herself as a self-creative entity, a human being could not get rid of his or her given environment, because of God's primordial solicitation.
- ¶35. If every actuality depends on its datum and on the principles which are controlling its subjectification, what would the meaning of a philosophy of history be? I have elsewhere tentatively discussed the theory that there could be no such conception in Whitehead's philosophy.[\[27\]](#) This theory would just be a consequence of the limitations imposed on every actuality according to God's nature. According to the eighteenth category of explanation, defining the ontological principle, or principle of efficient and final causation, an actuality, once it really exists as such, becomes a lure for other feelings, and so on. Hence, every actuality must be enmeshed in networks of causality in order to really exist itself, then, perish as an actuality, and become a finality for other actualities, according to the phase of concrescence or satisfaction. Thus, the ontological principle may be considered as the basic principle for the creation of becoming in the world, with the actualities being alternately causal or final entities, from a macroscopic perspective.
- ¶36. But could we really name this creation of becoming a history, in the concrete and practical sense of this term? Human history seems to imply that actualities emerging at the level of human consciousness could not be determined by a former datum alone, even if we admit that they are distinguished from it by the creativity of the emergent actuality. Hegel's conception of history is founded upon a conception of human society that is, in itself, an expression of freedom, i.e. of pure novelty, compared to the determination of actuality in Whitehead's cosmology.
- ¶37. Hence, Whitehead's conception of actuality seems to block any attempt to introduce a real independence into human history. This task is once more entrusted to a transcendent actuality, whose function is to ensure a real continuity of cosmic and human becoming.

- ¶38. The three forms by which Whitehead describes his metaphysical God are pointing to just as many difficulties as those of his cosmology. Let us review those difficulties:

The passage from pure to real potentiality, in order to create a new actuality;

The break between the datum and its free subjectification; and

The historic transition from one actuality to another, in human history.

For each of those impasses, the appeal to the three functions of divine activity gives us an indication of the way Whitehead envisages that they could be overcome. Of course, as we already remarked, Whitehead nevertheless avoids the classical handicap of treating God as a way to solve some troublesome, even insoluble questions, since God is subject to the same principles of explanation as all other actualities. But he gives those perplexities a form which can be admitted by non-religious people as well. Thus, to understand reality means to mark the limits inside which the real structure of the world could be formulated. According to this purpose, the mention of God operates as a device to make the world really thinkable, with its areas of clearness and penumbra.

- ¶39. This conception of metaphysics is in reality founded upon a particular vision of philosophizing activity. According to the definition he gives at the outset of *Process and Reality* as well as in *Adventures in Ideas*, Whitehead's philosophical intention seems to me to propose a cosmological framework within which human activity would be thinkable, in accordance with the laws that regulate the development of this activity. Human activity could then be considered as a particular case of a field theory: altogether, every one is inserted in a general network and capable of persuasion, in the double meaning of that term. Persuasion eventuates through people doing the persuading on the one hand, and through people being persuaded, on the other hand.

#### 4. Conclusion

- ¶40. Now, I would, by the way of a conclusion, like to present another philosophical intention, which is also non-substantialistic, but gives non-substantiality a different meaning, one more related to personal freedom, than to cosmic creativity, and to human history, as differing from mere evolution which also could be attributed to the capacity of persuasion. I am referring here to the *Logique de la Philosophie* by Eric Weil.

## The Coherence of Life

- ¶41. What is at stake now is the genuine meaning of the coherence aimed at by philosophical activity: is coherence defined in cosmological terms, in order to construct a categorical scheme that makes it possible to understand every event of the world? Or, is it defined as a moral or ethical attitude giving every human activity real value?
- ¶42. Eric Weil frankly presents his philosophical intention from this second perspective. He defines philosophy as a resolutely reasonable opposition to any form of violence, by the priority he assigns to right political action and to personal morality, which makes this action thinkable. This philosophical intention leads to some metaphysical consequences about the construction of reality.

## Metaphysical vs. Philosophical Categories

- ¶43. In his *Logique de la Philosophie*, Weil makes an important distinction between philosophical and metaphysical categories. He considers philosophical categories the ones that define just how the philosopher maintains the permanence of his philosophical intention in his personal life. , The practicability of metaphysical categories resides in the fact that they can provide the philosopher with explicative schemes, about some particular domains of knowledge, so that he can keep his philosophical intention coherent with his natural and human environment. Now, the philosophical intention of Weil is distinct from that of Whitehead because for Weil the philosopher can not limit himself to the comprehension of the world, but he is also aiming at the coherence of the whole of human society, through his comprehension and his educational participation in political life.
- ¶44. Clearly enough, this intention leads to some consequences about the conception of human life and human activities: Weil's metaphysics define the historical, social, political, and ethical conditions to which every one, and the philosopher as well, must freely agree to submit himself, if he wants to be a coherent individual in a coherent society. For in Weil's view, on the one hand, one could hardly have access to the coherence of a concept of nature without taking into account human freedom, which pertains to nature and nevertheless produces a reality of its own, clearly differentiated from any natural actuality. On the other hand, in Whiteheadian terminology, human freedom could only be defined as the sole objective defining characteristic of a human society of occasions, and of a human individual as well. Hence, we should invert Weil's conception for Whitehead. For him, one could hardly find the coherence of human politics without integrating it into the general coherence of the whole nature.

## Philosophy in the Making

- ¶45. Nevertheless, different as they are, these philosophical intentions converge on some major trends. We discover in both cases that primacy is assigned to action over substantial realities, such as individuals, or communities, or even states. For activity is that reality of human freedom, which is the guiding thread of the human condition, because one could not make sense of any coherent action without this presupposition. Thus, the presupposition of freedom appears in Whitehead's conception of persuasion in *Adventure in Ideas*, and in Weil's theory of the rejection of violence.
- ¶46. On the one hand, both are using the guiding thread of freedom to make their concepts of action make sense. On the other hand, each of them uses historical categories, different at each philosophical period, according to the situation in which the philosopher is living. Thus, on this particular point, Weil's conception of action could be compared with that of Whitehead. For both, the supremacy of action over pure theoretical activity is absolute, as a way to essential reality, even if their respective philosophical intentions are different. This supremacy given to human action by both philosophers is clear in its common essential elements:

The importance of rational activity, in order to become more and more aware of the constitutive elements of coherence in the world and/or society;

The embodiment of rationality in a living body: in PR, represented by the distinction between presentational immediacy, describable by any language, and its origin in the causal efficacy of the body: in Weil's philosophy represented by the important distinctions between *vie* and *vue*, between life and view.

- ¶47. Nevertheless, one important difference between the two conceptions of action has to be realized. According to Weil action could not be understood as guided by divine persuasion, as it is in the conception presented in *AI*. For Weil, the individual could not find his personal coherence without integrating social values into his own perspectives. The difference here resides in the role of history for the conception and the development of free action: Whitehead is reluctant to consider human action as being first historical in itself, whereas historical situatedness is for Weil an essential condition for social and moral activity. For sure, Whitehead would admit this vision, but he could not help to appeal to the Eros, or God's Primordial Nature, when giving his interpretation of human activity.

## The Rejection of the Category of Substance, as a Metaphysical Category, Historically Marked

- ¶48. For both, of course, the non-substantialistic turn has prevailed and re-shapes the philosophical attitude in the sense of a political or ethical or personal engagement, whose meaning must always be renewed, according to the general evolution of history. So it seems to me that these two non-substantialistic philosophers converge on a subjectification which is very useful for our times. Together, they allow new approaches for understanding everyday effective life, without falling into the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.
- ¶49. But, the two philosophers' respective interpretations of their rejections of substantialism differ from each others' quite a bit. Whitehead, particularly in *SMW* sees his rejection of substantialism as a consequence of the evolution of scientific conceptions, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth. For sure, Whitehead is going further, with the philosophy of organism. He sees in this rejection the key concept justifying his reformed subjectivist principle, since it is not before the introduction of a really subjective actuality in *PR* that he can really solve the problem of classical substantialism.
- ¶50. Nevertheless, his criticism of Kant about the concept of substance seems to be somewhat unjustified: Kant also criticized the classical concept of substance, and saw it as a production of the human understanding. Hegel followed Kant on that way, though with a somewhat different meaning, which is of course peculiar to him: he thought substance was not the final mark of reality, since he conceived it as a transient process of subjective activity:

Although the substance is "the immediate presupposition" of the concept, it is not in the mode of a fixed reality, through and through homogeneous, and so to speak static: it is movement, process, becoming, transition from the personal self to the "other" self, this "otherness" being here precisely what we could name the emergence of substance as concept, that is to say, subject. [\[28\]](#)

- ¶51. Thus, opposing Whitehead, Weil would interpret Kant and/or Hegel in the sense of a fundamental rejection of substance, since both are rejecting the static substance and give their preference to a reasonable subjective aim at a coherent human life. Hence, according to Weil, Kant and Hegel are opposed to the sole interest in particular and static realities, falsely defined as permanent by the human understanding, for, according to both Kant and Hegel, nothing that we consider in life is an unchanging entity.
- ¶52. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the more fundamental point of disagreement between Weil and Whitehead would have been that of their respective conceptions of human freedom and its relationship to philosophical activity.

## The Topic of Freedom: the Central Point of Divergence between Weil and Whitehead.

- ¶53. On the topic of freedom, Whitehead's novel conception of reality leads of course to a fecund discovery: the ultimate is pure creativity, which is often hidden by the daily use of language. But Weil's conception of human freedom goes beyond that discovery of the role of creativity, since he gives it an absolute and invaluable meaning: in Weil's view, freedom as ultimate reality plays nearly the same role as God's nature in process philosophy. What is attributed to God throughout Whitehead's whole work, such as *Principles of Unrest*, of *Concretion* and of *Ultimate Satisfaction*, is transferred to human freedom in Weil's conception of moral and political philosophy.

## Consequences for a Field Theory of Human Action

- ¶54. So, it seems to me that Weil's conception of political action throws a new light on Whitehead's philosophy of actuality. Of course, we could simply interpret the philosophy of organism with the resources of physics, in terms of a field theory, since any actual occasion is a new leap from multiple and diffused factors to a novel unity. [29] The concrescence by which this actuality is becoming a subjective aim for its own sake makes this new actuality effective for other actualizations. Whitehead's conception of God illustrates this transition from data to their ever-renewed actualities, and from those actualities to new data prehended by novel actualizations.
- ¶55. But in his *Logique de la Philosophie*, Weil goes further: he considers that in political or ethical action the reference to human freedom makes this leap of potentials to their realization quite unsatisfactory, from a philosophical point of view. Of course, this leap expresses a free reality, which affirms itself as entirely different from any interweaving of causes and effects which has determined it, according to the ninth categorical obligation. But in the case of human beings, this free reality is antecedent, not subsequent, to any temporal interweaving of causes and effects: it expresses an independence of the conceptual life that Whitehead would attribute only to God's Primordial Nature. By making freedom antecedent to causes and effects, Weil reveals the last meaning of Whitehead's theory of God, as the invaluable meaning that human beings are able to impose on any particular field, particularly in the domains of ethics and politics.

END NOTES

1. Alfred N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1933), 244.
2. *ibid.*, 245.
3. *ibid.*, 244.
4. *ibid.*, 244.
5. *ibid.*, 354-355: “The static notion, here rejected, is derived by two different paths from ancient thought. Plato in the earlier period of his thought, deceived by the beauty of mathematics intelligible through unchanging perfection, conceived of a super-world of ideas, forever perfect and forever interwoven. (...) Aristotle introduced the static fallacy by another concept which has infected all subsequent philosophy. He conceived of primary substances as the static foundations which received the impress of qualification.”
6. Whitehead mainly discusses this topic in Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, New York: Free Press (1978), Part IV, with his theory of The Extensive Continuum.
7. I think this is the reason why, according to D.Hurtubise's analysis, this conception was prior to the classical one in Whitehead's *Cosmology*; cf. D. Hurtubise: *Relire Whitehead - Les Concepts de Dieu dans Process and Reality*, especially pp. 102-104, about the initial conception of God in Whitehead's *Process and Reality*.
8. Alfred N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1933), 245.
9. *ibid.*, 245.
10. Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1953), 195-196.

- [11.](#) In either case, Whitehead is adopting the attitude exactly opposite to that of Aristotle: for Whitehead, the concrete basis is the process and abstraction is the production of substantialist concepts, whereas the substance is the concrete reference for the process of qualifying that substance, in Aristotle's logic.
- [12.](#) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1953), 211.
- [13.](#) *ibid.*, 213.
- [14.](#) Whitehead mentions this principle at the end of his chapter “Abstraction” in *Science and the Modern World*, just before the chapter “God,” in which he considers the actualization of this principle.
- [15.](#) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1953), 218.
- [16.](#) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1933), 27.
- [17.](#) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1953), 193-194.
- [18.](#) *ibid.*, 223.
- [19.](#) *ibid.*, 132. This notion is explicitly resumed in the chapter “God” (SMW, 219), where it is related to the concept of abruptness.
- [20.](#) *ibid.*, 132.
- [21.](#) *ibid.*, 132.
- [22.](#) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1933), 24.
- [23.](#) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1953), 140.

- [24.](#) *ibid.*, 214.
- [25.](#) *ibid.*, 222-223.
- [26.](#) *ibid.*, 222-223.
- [27.](#) Jean M. Breuvert, *Y-a-t-il une Philosophie d'histoire dans Aventures d'Idees* in I. Stengers (Ed.), *L'Effet Whitehead* Vrin (1994), 129 & svtes.
- [28.](#) G Jarczyk, *Systeme et Liberte dans la Logique de Hegel*, translated by Jean Breuvert, France: Aubier (1980), 176 (translation mine).
- [29.](#) Cf. the discussion about the private psychological field, related to physiology and physics, in SMW 186-187.

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