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NOTE

THE TWO PROCESS THEOLOGIES: A REAPPRAISAL

There are, says Bernard Lee, two Whiteheads, i.e., two sides to the personality of Alfred North Whitehead. There is the "doggedly empirical" Whitehead who probed the deeper ranges of human experience in his debate with the British empiricists. But there is also the "insistently rational" Whitehead who, on the basis of these empirically grounded reflections, set up a metaphysical scheme for the interpretation of all reality—in other words, a new cosmology.[1] While both sides of Whitehead's personality are authentic, and both dimensions of his philosophical enterprise valuable, the one, comments Lee, is "righter" than the other. That is, the empirically oriented Whitehead drawing attention to the complexity of human experience is more important for the future development of both philosophy and theology than the rationalist thinker who set forth in *Process and Reality* and other books an inevitably limited, historically conditioned set of metaphysical categories.[2]

From one perspective, Lee must be correct in his judgment here. Not only Whitehead but indeed every major thinker is ultimately remembered not for the details of his or her "system" but for the comprehensive insights which inspired the elaboration of a system in the first place. But from another perspective, perhaps those same comprehensive insights will not be fully appreciated until one makes the effort to compare Whitehead's metaphysics in some detail with the achievements of other "system builders" in the history of Western philosophy (e.g., Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel, etc.). It may be, for example, that Whitehead's most significant contribution to contemporary philosophy and theology lies in raising anew the question, not what it means to be human but, much more profoundly, what it means simply to be. His cosmological scheme, in other words, however fallible it might be in its details, may still represent his most lasting achievement, since it offers a dramatically new answer to the meaning of being. Yet the novelty and creativity of the answer only become apparent when one compares Whitehead's system with that of other philosophical "heavyweights" who likewise wrestled with the question of being.

To illustrate what I have in mind, I will set forth a hypothesis as to how the question of being was answered in ancient and medieval philos-

[1] Bernard J. Lee, S.M., "The Two Process Theologies," *TS* 45 (1984) 307.

[2] Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978) esp. 18–36 (27–54). The numbers in parentheses refer to the 1929 edition of *Process and Reality*, also published by Macmillan.

ophy, in modern philosophy since the time of Descartes, and in the philosophy of Whitehead. Naturally, the generalizations thus made will be too broad to "prove" in any strict sense of the word. Taken together, however, they should at least make clear why I believe that Whitehead the rationalist, the author of the cosmological scheme in *Process and Reality*, is more important than Whitehead the empiricist, the student of human nature.

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

My initial contention is that in ancient and medieval philosophy the meaning of being was so intertwined with the activity of thinking that the one came to be defined exclusively in terms of the other. That is, for an entity to exist was to be (at least) an object of thought; what could not be conceived did not exist, even as a possible existent. This is not to say, of course, that for ancient and medieval thinkers only objects of thought existed. Clearly, there had to be a distinction between actual entities and possible entities; some entities exist only in the mind, whereas others exist both in the mind and in extramental reality. Likewise, some entities have minds to entertain objects of thought (including their own being as objects of self-awareness). Other entities either lack mind altogether, so that they can serve only as objects of thought for entities with minds, or, in any case, lack self-awareness, so that they cannot make their own being an object of thought. But in the view of these early philosophers, the higher one ascended on the "ladder of being," the more the entity in question possessed self-awareness, the ability to make itself, its own being, the object of thought.

A cursory look at the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas confirms my observations here. For Plato, the Forms or the Ideas constitute the world of reality; physical things and their various "shadows" or imitations inhabit the world of appearances.[3] While there is a hierarchy of Forms culminating in the Idea of the Good, all the Forms without exception are objects of thought; they cannot be perceived by the senses.[4] Thus being for Plato is pre-eminently that which is (or at least can be) an object of thought. Whether the Idea of the Good is not only the supreme object of thought but likewise a Mind or thinking being is difficult to decide; for, as Frederick Copleston notes, it is then not clear what is the appropriate relationship between such a divine Mind and the Demiurge or World-soul of the *Timaeus*.[5] At least in this

[3] Plato, *The Republic* B, VI (509D–511E), in *The Republic of Plato*, tr. F. M. Cornford (New York: Oxford University, 1945) 221–26.

[4] W. T. Jones, *The Classical Mind* (2nd ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969) 124.

[5] Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy* 1/1 (New York: Doubleday, 1962) 217–18.

respect, Aristotle's thinking is much more precise. He expressly identifies God or the Supreme Being in his philosophy with Mind, thought thinking itself.[6] Furthermore, God is the Prime Mover for the unending motion of the universe and everything within it, insofar as God is the supreme object of thought. As Aristotle comments, "the primary objects of desire and of thought are the same. For the apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of rational wish."[7] Hence God is the Prime Mover insofar as the divine Being, thought thinking itself or eternal self-consciousness, is the object of rational wish, first for all immaterial substances and then for all material substances which are dependent upon the latter for their existence and activity.

Here one might object that for Aristotle the first category of being is not thought or the object of thought but rather substance.[8] Furthermore, a substance is able to be an object of thought because it already exists, not vice versa. Yet, upon reflection one realizes that what is common to all substances, material and immaterial alike, is form, that by reason of which the substance is what it is. Form, however, for Aristotle as for Plato, is the object of thought; as such, it cannot be perceived by the senses. Accordingly, even though Aristotle was fully aware that a given horse, for example, is not simply an instance of the species horse (as Plato believed) but likewise an individualized concrete existent (this horse rather than that horse), he still dealt with it primarily as an object of thought, i.e., in terms of its intelligible form, which can only be grasped in thought.[9] Aristotle, in other words, though far more empirically oriented than Plato, subconsciously was still an idealist. That is, he conceived the world as a hierarchically ordered scheme of objects of thought: from God as the supreme object of thought to prime matter as that which possessing no form of its own cannot be an object of thought, hence is completely unintelligible in and of itself. God as the supreme object of thought is, moreover, the supreme existent. Prime matter, on the other hand, is reduced to a principle of being, that which can exist only in conjunction with form, the proper object of thought.

By common consent, the theology of Aquinas is a highly creative synthesis of reason and revelation, i.e., Greek philosophy and the data of the Hebrew and Christian Bible. Since his chief task was the merger of these two disparate streams of thought, he inevitably could not be sharply critical of the theoretical presuppositions of Greek thought. Accordingly, the philosophical underpinning of his theology has the same idealistic orientation as the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. That is,

[6] Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1074b, in *The Works of Aristotle* 8, tr. W. D. Ross (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1928).

[7] Ibid. 1072a.

[8] Ibid. 1028a.

[9] Ibid. 1041b.

for Aquinas, too, being is implicitly defined in terms of thinking and the objects of thought. He begins his *Summa theologiae*, for example, with rational proofs for the existence of God derived from application of the Aristotelian causes to the God-world relationship.[10] Within his scheme, therefore, God is the first principle of a metaphysical system in which the real existence of the world is taken for granted, and its intelligibility in terms of material, formal, efficient, and final causality is carefully worked out. Just as with Aristotle, therefore, attention is given to the individual existent, not in terms of its concrete particularity but in terms of its universal form or immaterial essence whereby it fits into a causal explanation of the universe. Even God is less an individual entity than a logical function within an a priori cosmological scheme.

Naturally, one could here object that in these early "questions" of the *Summa theologiae* Thomas was merely setting forth what can be known about God through the use of natural reason before taking up the revealed knowledge of God as triune in questions 29–43. In question 44, however, where Aquinas begins his explanation of God as Creator, he does not work with the notion of God as triune as rather with the understanding of God as transcendent First Cause derived from the proofs for the existence of God in the opening questions. Hence his model for the God-world relationship is not the triune God of Christian revelation but the one God of natural reason. Furthermore, even within his exposition of the Trinity he presupposes that God is one being and explains how God can likewise be three persons.[11] That is, he explains how God through the immanent operations of knowing and loving His own being or nature perfectly is, in fact, three persons, not one person. Philosophically speaking, therefore, Aquinas is still working with a notion of God much akin to that of Aristotle. That is, God is absolute or self-sufficient Being because the immanent operations of knowing and loving terminate in God's own nature or essence. God is, in other words, infinite Mind knowing and loving itself and as such the object of rational desire for all other entities whose being and activity are not self-contained.

Impressive as it is in other respects, therefore, Aquinas' metaphysics of the God-world relationship must be regarded as an a priori scheme which looks only to the universalizable dimensions of the entities in question, God included. As such, the metaphysical world view of Aquinas (like that of Aristotle before him) consists in a hierarchically ordered set of concepts which are logically related to one another but only indirectly grounded in the lived experience of Aquinas and his followers. Its starting

[10] Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 2, a. 3.

[11] Ibid., q. 27: "Consideratis autem his quae ad divinae essentiae unitatem pertinent, restat considerare de his quae pertinent ad trinitatem Personarum in divinis."

point, in other words, is not in the human being's perception of himself/herself as a concrete individual existent but in a reflection on that same concrete individual existence as a particular verification of universal metaphysical principles.

MODERN PHILOSOPHY SINCE DESCARTES

Keeping this in mind, one sees immediately how René Descartes, the first philosopher of the modern period of Western philosophy, dramatically changed the rules of the game, so to speak. He began his philosophy with conscious reference to himself as a concrete individual subject of experience. Admittedly, his long-range intention was to set up a conceptual scheme with the same level of metaphysical generality as that of Aquinas and the other medieval scholastics. But in describing at length his personal search for an absolutely certain starting point for philosophical reflection, and above all in concluding that it could only lie in the implicit affirmation of his own existence within the act of reflection itself,[12] Descartes directed attention to the reality of human subjectivity in a way that would have been impossible within the more objective conceptual schemes of Aquinas and the other scholastics. Moreover, the subsequent history of Western philosophy has until recently tended to move in the same direction, i.e., to explore the inner world of human subjectivity as the hermeneutical key to the understanding of the entire cosmos. Concrete human experience rather than abstract logic has been the touchstone for the validity of metaphysical constructs.

Among early post-Cartesian philosophers, for example, John Locke stands out as one who advocated the priority of epistemology over metaphysics, i.e., the study of the process of human knowing as the necessary precondition for trustworthy knowledge of the external world. Furthermore, his "historical, plain method"[13] is an appeal not to logic but to common-sense empirical observation of one's own conscious operations in dealing with the external world. Ironically, this attempt to sidestep the a priori approach of the medieval scholastic systems was severely handicapped by Locke's uncritical acceptance of two a priori assumptions out of Descartes's philosophy. First, he accepted the Cartesian presupposition that the proper object of human understanding is an idea rather than the extramental existent to which the idea as a sign refers. Secondly, he accepted without reservation Descartes's analytical approach to the study of ideas: the "building blocks" of human knowledge

[12] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), Part 4, tr. John Veitch, in *The Rationalists* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Dolphin Book, 1960) 62–68.

[13] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction, n. 2; ed. A. C. Fraser, Vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1959) 27.

are simple ideas derived from sensation or immediate reflection upon sense data, and that complex ideas such as those of substance, cause and effect, etc., are derived solely from the activity of the mind in combining, comparing, and separating simple ideas.[14] In this way Locke could not logically account for the objectivity of broader patterns of intelligibility within human experience. Thus he inadvertently paved the way for his successors in the tradition of British empiricism, first to deny the reality of the material world (Berkeley) and then to deny the reality of God and the thinking self (Hume).

Despite these pardonable errors in methodology and first principles, Locke and his successors were breaking new ground in the study of human subjectivity as the implicit basis for knowledge of the external world. Furthermore, while many philosophers on the Continent were still preoccupied with the traditional metaphysical questions of the schoolmen, Immanuel Kant recognized the importance of the empiricist tradition in England and devised his own "critical" philosophy as a conscious response to the scepticism about the possibility of scientific knowledge resulting therefrom (particularly from the writings of David Hume).[15] In retrospect, one sees that Kant's vindication of synthetic a priori judgments as the metaphysical basis for scientific knowledge of the world is far less significant than his overall project of exploring the implicit structures of the human mind. Furthermore, Kant's successors, the German idealists (notably, Schelling and Hegel), introduced a new cosmological perspective into the study of human subjectivity with their insistence that the human mind is a finite self-realization of the divine mind. Hence, probing in systematic fashion the structures of the human mind gives indirect access to the workings of the divine mind as the latter reveals itself, first in the world of nature and then in the course of human history.

With the speculative triumph of the systems of Hegel and Schelling, however, an antimetaphysical reaction arose which to some extent has endured to this day. First, Karl Marx and his followers asserted the primacy of praxis over *theoria*, i.e., critical reflection in the service of a revolutionary movement as opposed to the isolated attempt simply to understand the *status quo* in terms of some ontology.[16] Moreover, in their judgment, metaphysical thinking has quite often impeded needed social change, since it covertly serves as a form of ideology to protect the interests of the ruling classes in society. Later in the century Frederick

[14] Cf. James Collins, *A History of Modern European Philosophy* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1954) 315–17.

[15] Ibid. 458–68.

[16] Cf. Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971) 11–83, esp. 50–55.

Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, thereby predicting in symbolic language the eventual downfall of the whole system of cultural values on which Western civilization has been built. Finally, at the beginning of the present century Sigmund Freud uncovered the subconscious base of human consciousness, the conflicts of infrapersonal impulse and desire which systematically distort the deliverances of human rationality. The net result of these reflections has been, by and large, to discredit altogether or at least seriously to question the possibility of achieving objective knowledge of the world through analysis of the a priori structures of human consciousness. These "masters of suspicion," as David Tracy calls them,[17] have permanently impaired the original naive trust of Westerners in self-consciousness, the power of the human mind to critique its own operations and thus by degrees to achieve full rationality.[18]

Yet, if the ideal of transcendental subjectivity is found lacking, to what system of ideas can thinking individuals have recourse in order to regain a sense of objectivity in their dealings with one another? Some would argue that the virtual bankruptcy of modern philosophy should signal a long-overdue return to the principles and methods of Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics. At least within the classical world of discourse one is capable of achieving objectivity about the primal realities of God, self, and the world. But many individuals would counterargue that the objectivity of Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics is bought at too great a price; for it is grounded, as noted above, in an a priori set of concepts which possess internal consistency, to be sure, but do not seem adequately to reflect either the complexities of contemporary human life in society or the findings of modern science. Hence they prefer to search for a new metaphysical frame of reference which would take better account of these other factors.

Many contemporary thinkers, of course, still share the traditional Marxist suspicion of metaphysics as covert ideology and favor instead various kinds of praxis-oriented reflection. While not discounting the importance of the overall social context for the task of reflection, I personally believe that praxis-oriented thinking is a method in search of a metaphysics. That is, it makes numerous presuppositions about the

[17] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 349.

[18] This is not to deny, of course, that individuals through a series of "conversions" (intellectual, moral, and religious) can achieve a higher degree of rational self-consciousness than they currently possess; cf. on this point Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Insight* (3rd ed.; New York: Philosophical Library, 1970); likewise, Lonergan's *Method in Theology* (2nd ed.; New York: Herder & Herder, 1973) esp. 235–93. But it still remains an open question whether the human mind even after these "conversions" consistently attains the kind of objectivity which is simply taken for granted in classical metaphysics (cf. here my article "Authentic Subjectivity and Genuine Objectivity," *Horizons* 11 [1984] 290-303).

nature of reality, the dynamics of human subjectivity, the meaning of truth, etc., which are not critically examined and co-ordinated with one another so as to constitute an articulate frame of reference for the analysis of more particular issues arising out of the political, economic, and social context in question. As a result, there is always the lingering suspicion that praxis-oriented thinking itself will turn out to be ideology in the service of a particular interest-group within society.[19] Basically the same criticism can be made of the proposal to achieve objectivity through dialogue, i.e., ongoing exchange of views between representatives of different schools of thought, various religious or cultural traditions, etc.[20] While much good is to be gained from such enlightened conversation among highly motivated participants, dialogue would likewise seem to be a method in search of a metaphysics. True dialogue, in other words, requires at least an implicit frame of reference for the discussion of more particular points of interest. Otherwise it degenerates into simple tolerance of views which are totally alien to one's own and which, accordingly, have to be judged as bizzare rather than challenging.

WHITEHEAD

If a new metaphysics is called for, then, from what quarter is it to come? In my judgment, it will come out of the natural sciences in the form of a new cosmology. Much as the Ionian tradition of reflection on the natural origin of things prepared the way for the more explicit metaphysical systems of Plato and, above all, of Aristotle, so the philosophy of science coming out of recent discoveries in physics, chemistry, and biology will eventually bear fruit in a new cosmology, a new answer to the question, what does it mean to be (as opposed to the more typical modern question, what does it mean to be human)? Furthermore, among the more distinguished philosophers of science within this century, I would think that Alfred North Whitehead is clearly the most philosophically sophisticated. That is, even though details of his system are defective and will have to be revised or replaced, the system as a whole is the most comprehensive attempt at a general cosmology which this century has produced. In the third and last part of this paper, therefore, I will set forth, first, two of the leading metaphysical principles of Whitehead's scheme which I think will be of enduring value for the projected new world view, and secondly, two areas of philosophy where further reflection and revision are patently needed.

Perhaps Whitehead's most significant insight in terms of a new world

[19] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* 78–79.

[20] Cf., e.g., Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1979) esp. 1–68 ("What Is Universal Pragmatics?").

view is his so-called "reformed subjectivist principle," the principle that "apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness."[21] The definition of being, what it means to be an existent, is thereby dramatically changed. Whereas in classical metaphysics, as noted above, being was implicitly defined in terms of objects of thought within a hierarchically ordered a priori scheme, within Whitehead's philosophy being is explicitly defined in terms of subjects of experience. Western philosophy since Descartes, to be sure, has focused on individual human beings as subjects of experience; but each human being is thus the center of his/her own subjective "world" in which everything else (including other human beings) are objects of thought. Accordingly, the post-Cartesian move to individual human experience as the starting point of philosophical reflection is, from the perspective of Whiteheadian metaphysics, only a "halfway house" toward full recognition of the validity of the reformed subjectivist principle. Experience is indeed the starting point of philosophical reflection. But experience is not limited to the experience of human beings; all entities whatsoever are subjects of experience, and apart from the experiences of subjects there is, in Whitehead's words, "bare nothingness."

Admittedly, this principle of Whitehead defies common-sense observation. It is apparent that human beings and other animals are subjects of experience in varying degrees. It is not at all apparent that plants and, even more so, inanimate things are likewise subjects of experience. Nor does Whitehead himself make precisely this claim. Rather, he suggests that the realities of macroscopic experience (e.g., human beings, other animals, plants, artifacts, etc) are, one and all, societies of momentary submicroscopic subjects of experience. Hence, not even a human being in his/her temporal consciousness is a single subject of experience but a series of such subjects in rapid succession. We seem to experience ourselves, of course, as a single ongoing subject of experience. But reflection reveals that at every moment new sense data are received which demand a new unity of temporal consciousness and, by implication, a new subject of experience. Hence, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, we are in our temporal consciousness a society of "actual entities," as Whitehead calls them.[22] Similarly, the momentary submicroscopic subjects of experience which constitute our bodies and all other physical entities existing here and now are being renewed from moment to moment, so that all macroscopic realities perdure as societies of actual entities, groupings of momentary submicroscopic subjects of experience in space and time.

[21] Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 167 (254).
[22] Ibid. 18–20, 34–35 (27–30, 50–52).

If this appears to be a totally implausible hypothesis, one should remember that the theories currently offered by natural scientists (e.g., physicists and chemists) about the ultimate constituents of material reality are equally far removed from common-sense experience. The natural scientists, to be sure, are not suggesting that "quarks" or other subatomic entities are momentary subjects of experience, as Whitehead proposes. But it is increasingly clear that subatomic energy-events are not simply reducible to interactions between minute particles at fixed locations in the space-time continuum. The entities in question likewise exhibit the properties of electrical impulses or waves simultaneously present at several locations within the continuum.[23] One philosophical explanation for this lack of "simple location," of course, is that the entity in question is an intentional reality, namely, a subject of experience whose sphere of influence and activity is not limited to a fixed point in space and time. Naturally, scientists would be cautious in affirming that material bodies are thus ultimately composed of nonmaterial or spiritual entities, since there is no way to verify such a hypothesis empirically. But at the very least one can say that Whitehead's metaphysics is a legitimate extension of current speculation within the scientific community as to the nature of material reality.

The second principle within his scheme which in my judgment will be of enduring value for a new cosmology or metaphysical world view is the so-called ontological principle whereby every actual entity comes into being in virtue of a "decision" with respect to its own self-constitution. It is, in other words, its own sufficient reason, even though other actual entities (including God as the supreme exemplification of an actual entity) and the principle of creativity are likewise involved in its process of self-constitution.[24] Whitehead is here defining what it means to be a subject of experience in a way which dramatically sets his philosophy apart from the thought-patterns of classical metaphysics and, to a lesser extent, from the conventional ways of thinking within post-Cartesian modern philosophy. Whereas in classical metaphysics only God is *Causa sui*, Whitehead is saying that every actual entity is *causa sui*. It is, in fact, the nature of subjectivity that every subject of experience from God to a fleeting moment in the existence of a subatomic particle should be

[23] Cf., e.g., David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983) 122–39.

[24] Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 24 (37): "This ontological principle means that actual entities are the only *reasons*; so that to search for a reason is to search for one or more actual entities." The reason why a given actual entity is constituted one way rather than another is partly because it arose in a world of past actual entities already fixed in their being and intelligibility and partly because it made a "decision" about how to appropriate such data for its own self-constitution.

its own sufficient reason. As noted above, other entities (chief among them, God with His so-called "initial aims"[25] for the entity in question) play a heavy role in shaping that decision whereby it comes into being. But the entity itself has to "cut off" irrelevant possibilities, albeit in the great majority of cases unconsciously, in order to become itself as something definite.

Shortly I will suggest a way in which this new understanding of subjectivity can be reconciled with traditional Christian belief in God as Creator. Here I wish to stress the revolutionary character of Whitehead's proposal. In his influential critique of the history of Western philosophy, for example, Martin Heidegger described it as basically a devolution from genuine ontology, the study of being, to onto-theo-logy, the study of the Supreme Being in its causal relationship to the world of creation.[26] Onto-theo-logy, of course, is grounded in the premise that God alone is *Causa sui* and that all other beings depend for their existence and activity upon God as their First Efficient Cause. In my estimation, what Heidegger was really criticizing was the hierarchically ordered scheme of objects of thought which was characteristic of the ancient and medieval vision of the world. Heidegger, in other words, wanted to dispense with the logical apparatus of the ancient and medieval world view in order to look more closely at the manifestations of being in everyday life. What he was implicitly searching for, then, was an understanding of existence (above all, human existence) as self-grounding (rather than grounded in a transcendent object of thought traditionally called God).[27] Heidegger, accordingly, despite his avowed dislike for all forms of metaphysical thinking, may well have been looking for a new ontology, a new understanding of the meaning of being, which would be grounded in concrete (human) experience rather than in logic or abstract conceptual schemes. In my judgment, Whitehead with his insistence on the ontological principle, namely, that every actual entity is ultimately its own sufficient reason, provides the logical starting point for that new empirically grounded metaphysics which Heidegger himself never uncovered.

Naturally, much more space would be needed to substantiate these claims even in a minimal way. Instead, as I proposed at the beginning of this essay, I will briefly mention two problem-areas within Whitehead's philosophy which unquestionably need further development and/or clarification. The first is the Whiteheadian notion of society, i.e., a grouping

[25] Ibid. 244 (373–74).

[26] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 54.

[27] Cf., e.g., Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (Frankfurt: Vitorio Klostermann, 1955) 53–54, where he identifies the ground of being with freedom in the sense of *Transzendenz*, i.e., the power of radical self-constitution.

of actual entities in space and time which constitutes an enduring reality of some kind (e.g., atoms, molecules, cells, entire organisms—persons and things of macroscopic experience). The existence and effective operation of such societies cannot be doubted. As Whitehead himself says, "the real actual things that endure are all societies. They are not actual occasions."[28] On the other hand, Whitehead also insists that actual occasions (or actual entities) "are the final real things of which the world is made up."[29] This raises a question as to the proper ontological status of societies. Are they simply aggregates of actual entities or is the society in each case a new and more comprehensive ontological reality than its constituent actual entities? Moreover, if it is a new ontological reality, does it exercise agency? Or is agency in the strict sense limited to actual entities in their dynamic interrelation?

Within the bounds of the present essay, there is no way adequately to respond to these questions. But a moment's reflection makes clear that the only way out of this speculative dilemma is to rethink drastically what one means by a society within a Whiteheadian frame of reference. If, for example, a society is not itself an entity (since only actual entities are entities in the strict sense of the term), then perhaps it should be understood as the unified field of activity coconstituted by the dynamic interrelation of actual entities. In that case it would indeed be distinguished by a common element of form, as Whitehead proposes in *Process and Reality*,[30] but the common element of form would be instantiated not in the society itself as some imaginary supraindividual entity, but in its member actual entities insofar as they are dynamically related to one another. Furthermore, one could continue to argue with Whitehead that only actual entities exercise agency in the strict sense of the term.[31] But one could also urge that societies as unified fields of activity exercise a type of corporate agency in and through the interrelated individual agencies of their constituent actual entities. After all, what else does a unified field of activity signify if not that the reality in question somehow comports itself as a unified whole?

These remarks, of course, are intended to be suggestive rather than probative. That is, they indicate a problem-area within Whitehead's philosophical scheme, namely, the tendency to metaphysical atomism within his doctrine of actual entities. But they also make clear that a solution to the problem may well be at hand if one is willing to make certain adjustments in the Whiteheadian categoreal scheme. Keeping this in mind, I address now the second major problem-area in White-

[28] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967) 204.
[29] Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 18 (27).
[30] Ibid. 34 (50–51).
[31] Ibid. 31 (46).

head's thought, namely, the God-world relationship. According to the ontological principle, as noted above, every actual entity is its own sufficient reason. In and through the principle of creativity, the entity is empowered to make a decision about its own self-constitution. Since God, too, is dependent upon the principle of creativity for the divine self-constitution at any given moment,[32] it appears that there is no way to legitimate the traditional understanding of God as Creator within the Whiteheadian scheme of things. On the other hand, as I have pointed out elsewhere,[33] if God be understood in trinitarian fashion as a society of three divine persons, then it might be possible to interpret creativity, first and foremost, as the principle whereby the three divine persons exist both in themselves and in relation to one another. Then, with respect to creation, creativity could be represented as the self-communication of the divine persons to their creatures whereby the latter exist in themselves as individual finite entities, in relation to one another, and, finally, in relation to the persons of the Trinity. Creativity, in other words, is the metaphysical principle through which "the many become one and are increased by one."[34] Whitehead in his preoccupation with the doctrine of actual entities apparently did not recognize that this principle which governs the self-constitution of individual actual entities should logically govern the coconstitution of the societies to which the actual entities belong. That is, not only is an individual actual entity a novel unity of physical and conceptual "prehensions";[35] each society to which the entity belongs is moment by moment a novel unity of concrescing actual entities.

Once again, my purpose here is not to settle a controversial issue definitively but to open up new possibilities for dealing with it. As I have tried to make clear in this essay as a whole, Whitehead's philosophy represents a clear break with the basic orientation of ancient and medieval philosophy. That is, like post-Cartesian modern philosophy, it is grounded in experience rather than abstract conceptual schemes. But unlike most modern philosophy, it is not limited to human experience with its concomitant dangers of psychologism and subjectivism. Rather, using human experience of temporal consciousness as a model, Whitehead projects an entire cosmology grounded in the notion of experience, the experience of actual entities. Admittedly, his categoreal scheme needs

[32] Ibid. 88 (135).

[33] Cf., e.g., "Subsistent Relation: Mediating Concept for a New Synthesis?" *Journal of Religion* 64 (1984) 188–204, esp. 195–96; likewise, "Process Philosophy and Trinitarian Theology—II," *Process Studies* 11 (1981) 83–96, esp. 86–87.

[34] Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 21 (32).

[35] Ibid. 19, 23–24 (28–29, 35).

rethinking. More work, for example, has to be done with the notion of society so as to compensate for what otherwise might be an overemphasis on the reality of actual entities. Yet the categoreal scheme itself in its fundamental features will most likely survive. In this sense Whitehead the rationalist is more important than Whitehead the empiricist; for the inventor of the categoreal scheme elaborated in *Process and Reality* has given his readers the basic blueprints for a new world view, a new systematic understanding of reality which with appropriate modifications over the years might well become the conventional wisdom of the future.

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