

## BODILY RESURRECTION AND THE DIALECTIC OF SPIRIT AND MATTER

JOSEPH A. BRACKEN, S.J.

*[Christian belief in bodily resurrection is implicitly challenged by contemporary natural science with its empirical evidence for the interdependence of mental and bodily functions and their effective cessation at the moment of death. The author argues that only a new philosophical understanding of the relation between spirit and matter in which neither is intelligible without the other can render the notion of resurrection rationally plausible to scientists and offer new possibilities to theologians for explaining both eternal life and the new creation predicted in Revelation 21:1.]*

TWO OF THE more prominent process-oriented philosophers of the late-19th and early-20th century within North America were unquestionably Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). Initial reading of their writings might well suggest that they held opposite opinions about the nature of reality. With his belief that “the final real things of which the world is made up” are actual occasions or momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, Whitehead can legitimately be considered a philosophical atomist.<sup>1</sup> Peirce, on the contrary, placed very strong emphasis on continuity within nature as implied by his notion of “synechism” as a “regulative principle” governing both mind and matter.<sup>2</sup> But Whitehead provided for continuity in nature through the category of “society,” the aggregation of actual occasions in both space and

JOSEPH A. BRACKEN, S.J., received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Freiburg in Breisgau. He is now retired professor of theology at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, where he continues to research trinitarian theology as well as process philosophy and theology. His recent publications include *World without End: Christian Eschatology from a Process Perspective* (Eerdmans, 2005) and *Christianity and Process Thought: Spirituality for a Changing World* (Templeton Foundation, 2006). He is also preparing a volume entitled *The Doctrine of God* (Sheed and Ward).

<sup>1</sup> See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free, 1978) 18; see also 35: “Thus the ultimate metaphysical truth is atomism. The creatures are atomic.”

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 6 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1935) 6, nos. 169–73.

time in virtue of a “common element of form.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Peirce was equally emphatic that chance or spontaneity is also operative in natural processes so that physical laws are statistical generalizations rather than absolute determinations of the way things work; continuity amid such variety in nature is preserved by “the tendency of all things to take habits,” to move “from difformity to uniformity.”<sup>4</sup>

On an even more fundamental level, however, in my judgment Whitehead and Peirce are alike in their basic understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter, what Peirce calls “objective idealism,” namely, “that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws.”<sup>5</sup> Mind or spirit, in other words, is the more foundational reality; but it has a dialectical relationship to matter as its necessary self-manifestation or self-expression. Thus wherever spirit exists, there is matter understood as the growth of “habit” within nature. Likewise, wherever matter or “habit” exists, there is antecedently spirit, at least in some attenuated form. Whitehead, as I see it, was implicitly making the same claim with his assertion that actual entities or actual occasions are “subject-superjects.”<sup>6</sup> Once a concreting subject of experience has come to a self-constituting “decision,” it expresses itself as a prehensible or material reality for successor actual occasions and thereby ceases to exist as a non-prehensible or purely spiritual reality. A “common element of form” or pattern is thereby transmitted from one actual occasion (or set of contemporary actual occasions) to another.

By implication, then, form or pattern is the material counterpart or necessary self-expression of spirit when the latter is understood either as a self-constituting subject of experience (for Whitehead) or as an inevitable consequence of the operation of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (for Peirce). Admittedly, this is not the standard interpretation of either Peirce or Whitehead, nor is it quite possibly what either philosopher explicitly had in mind while working out his cosmological scheme. But it seems to be there as an unexpressed presupposition of their respective world views and, as I shall attempt to make clear below, with some modest “tweaking” on my part it sheds new light on a variety of philosophical and theological issues, notably the mind-body problem and classical Christian belief in life after death and the resurrection of the body.

### SPIRIT AND MATTER IN WHITEHEAD AND PEIRCE

I begin then with a reexamination of what Whitehead meant by “superject” within the broader concept of “subject-superject.” In other words,

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 34. <sup>4</sup> *Collected Papers* 6, no. 101.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* no. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 29.

what do successor actual entities prehend as the basis for their own self-constitution? Whitehead comments: "In the philosophy of organism it is not 'substance' which is permanent but 'form.' Forms suffer changing relations; actual entities 'perpetually perish' subjectively but are immortal objectively."<sup>7</sup> But what is objectively immortal here except a feeling-laden form or mini-pattern available for incorporation into the subjectivity of the next actual occasion(s)? The subject of experience expires once it has completed its process of concrescence. Presumably all that remains is the objective result of the subject's self-constituting "decision": in the first place, a pattern or form that brought into harmony all the "feelings" derived from the subject's multiple prehensions of the world around it; and in the second place, the unified feeling or set of feelings accompanying that same form or pattern.<sup>8</sup> Whitehead, to be sure, talks about the "satisfaction" achieved by the actual entity upon completion of its process of concrescence.<sup>9</sup> But this is a misleading statement since technically there no longer exists a subject to feel that "satisfaction."<sup>10</sup> The feelings are indeed passed on to the next actual occasion (or set of actual occasions). But the subject itself as the original "feeler" of the feelings is no longer there since subjectivity as such cannot be directly objectified or physically prehend. Only in its objective self-manifestation or "superject" is it prehensible.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See Judith A. Jones, *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University, 1998) 8–12. Jones argues convincingly that an actual occasion in its process of concrescence aims at a subjective unity of the feelings derived from "prehension" of antecedent actual occasions. She also argues that the subjectivity of the actual occasion is still somehow present in the way it "superjects" that unified feeling to subsequent actual occasions (3,29). As I shall make clear in the course of this article, my own view is that the feeling remains but that the original "feeler" of the feeling is gone, having completed its process of concrescence. The feeling along with the form or pattern proper to the self-constitution of the actual occasion is incorporated into the society or structured field of activity to which the actual occasion belongs. Subsequent actual occasions "prehend" that feeling-laden form in the overall structure and energy-level of the field rather than directly in the antecedent actual occasion itself. The field, after all, is being continually generated by interrelated subjects of experience and thus should be a suitable vehicle for the transmission of feeling as well as of form to subsequent actual occasions.

<sup>9</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 44, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Marjorie Suchocki has persuasively argued that for every actual occasion there is a fleeting moment of "enjoyment" when it experiences itself as fully constituted before projecting its completed self into the future (see Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* [Albany: State University of New York, 1988] 88–89). But even here one has to ask what happens next, what in the end gets transmitted to future actual occasions beyond a form or pattern and its concomitant feelings. By definition a subject of experience cannot be fully objectified without ceasing to be a subject.

What I am urging here is that many Whiteheadians (and perhaps Whitehead himself in his apparent preference for the term “actual entity” over “actual occasion” in *Process and Reality* and elsewhere) are guilty of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.<sup>11</sup> That is, they are in imagination giving lasting reality to what logically no longer exists. Whitehead, for example, describes a superject as an “atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality. It has become a ‘being’; and it belongs to the nature of every ‘being’ that it is a potential for every ‘becoming.’”<sup>12</sup> But what is that “being” beyond a form or pattern with its accompanying feelings? Both form and feeling can be physically prehended by the next set of actual occasions as part of the objective data for their own self-constitution, but there is no entitative reality there except in our human imagination. From this perspective, “actual occasion” would have been a far better term than “actual entity” for Whitehead consistently to employ in setting forth his metaphysical scheme since “actual occasion” reminds the reader that it is a passing event, not an enduring thing. It comes into being and expires but at the same time leaves the objective effect of its momentary existence and activity on the feeling-laden pattern or structure of the world around it.

But, you may object, how do we make the transition from form and feeling to the persons and things of common-sense experience? Whitehead’s answer is that the aggregation of actual occasions into “societies” extended in time and space corresponds to the material realities of ordinary perception. Given contemporary understanding of the world of quantum physics in which matter and energy are mutually convertible, this is not an implausible hypothesis. But, as Peter Douglas has effectively argued, there is still the logical problem how an aggregate of individually constituted entities can together create a higher-order objective unity with a mode of existence and activity different from its constituent parts.<sup>13</sup> My own solution to this problem within Whitehead’s metaphysics has been for many years now to stipulate that Whiteheadian “societies” are structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions.<sup>14</sup> Each actual occasion by its self-constituting “decision” not only determines the form proper

<sup>11</sup> See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free, 1967) 51.

<sup>12</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 45.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Douglas, “Whitehead and the Problem of Compound Individuals,” *Process Studies* 33 (2004) 80–109.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University, 1991); *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); also “Energy-Events and Fields,” *Process Studies* 18 (1989) 153–65; “Proposals for Overcoming the Atomism within Process-Relational Metaphysics,” *Process Studies* 23 (1994) 12–24.

to its own mode of existence but likewise with its contemporaries in the same "society" contributes to the form proper to their co-existence, their "common element of form," as precisely this society. The mini-patterns proper to each of the constituent actual occasions thus merge to produce the mega-pattern of existence and activity proper to the society as a whole.

Many years ago, Charles Hartshorne, Whitehead's most celebrated disciple, proposed that the higher-order unity thus needed for the existence and activity of physical organisms and even of complex inanimate compounds could be provided by stipulating that the dominant subsociety of actual occasions within a Whiteheadian "structured society" could give order and direction to all the other subsocieties even as it received information from all of them in virtue of its function as the "soul" or organizing principle of the whole.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Hartshorne was still thinking in terms of the classical paradigm for the relationship between the One and the Many originally proposed by Plato: namely, that the One gives order and direction to the Many by ordering the empirical Many to itself as their transcendent organizing principle. What I have proposed, on the contrary, is a new paradigm for that same relationship between the One and the Many: namely, that the Many by their dynamic interrelationship co-create the reality of the One as their strictly immanent principle of unity. Thus, in virtue of the principle of Creativity within Whitehead's philosophy, actual occasions not only achieve the subjective unity proper to their individual self-constitution but together with their contemporaries within the same "society" co-create the objective unity proper to the society as a whole.

The persons and things of common sense experience are then what Whitehead calls "structured societies" or societies composed of hierarchically ordered subsocieties of actual occasions. All these subsocieties collaborate in producing a given physical reality, whether animate or inanimate. My revisionist proposal is to think of all these subsocieties as hierarchically ordered fields of activity for the dynamic interplay of actual occasions at different levels of existence and activity within the physical world: atomic, molecular, cellular, organismic, supraorganic (i.e., environmental and communitarian), etc. Thus, at each level of existence and activity within Nature, immaterial subjects of experience by their dynamic interrelation are co-creating structured fields of activity corresponding to the entities of common sense experience, the material realities available to ordinary sense perception. What endures from moment to moment are not

<sup>15</sup> Charles Hartshorne, "The Compound Individual," *Philosophical Essays for Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. F. S. C. Northrup (New York: Russell & Russell, 1936) 193–220.

individual actual occasions but the energy-laden patterns of their ongoing interrelation. Matter is thus linked with spirit as its necessary self-expression, provided that by matter one understands a combination of form and feeling (information and energy) rather than something simply inert and passive as in the classical understanding of the term “matter” and that by spirit one has in mind a Whiteheadian actual occasion or subject of experience in its process of self-constitution.

Turning now to the philosophy of Peirce, I find an analogous understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter. As noted above, Peirce regarded matter as “effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws.”<sup>16</sup> Likewise, in another essay he comments: “[I]f matter has no existence except as a specialization of mind, it follows that whatever affects matter according to regular laws is itself matter. But all mind is directly or indirectly connected with all matter, and acts in a more or less regular way; so that all mind more or less partakes of the nature of matter.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, for Peirce as well as for Whitehead there is a dialectical relationship between spirit and matter. Wherever the one is found, the other in some way or other is also necessarily present.

This same conclusion is reached through careful analysis of what Peirce means by Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Firstness is associated with spontaneity or feeling.<sup>18</sup> But spontaneity or feeling implies a “feeler” or subject of experience. Secondness involves the notion of struggle or resistance to Firstness, namely, what is initially perceived as existing in and for itself.<sup>19</sup> Peirce refers to it as the experience of the Non-Ego over against the Ego.<sup>20</sup> The Non-Ego, of course, could be the Ego experiencing itself or something else in a subsequent moment of consciousness or it could be still another subject of experience somehow impinging upon the consciousness of the Ego. In either case, the ensuing effort to achieve a mediation between the new and the old results over time in Thirdness, an enduring representation of their relation to one another.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, this “law of mind” according to Peirce is likewise active in Nature or extra-mental reality as the tendency to habit-taking.<sup>22</sup> Thus, very much like Whitehead with his doctrine of “societies” of actual occasions linked together through the transmission of a “common element of form,” Peirce also sees the activity of spirit or subjectivity in terms of the ongoing transmission of form and feeling so as over time to constitute both habits of the mind and the material realities of common sense experience.

<sup>16</sup> See above, no. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 6, no. 198; also 5, no. 44.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 5, no. 57.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 6, no. 277.

<sup>17</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* 6, no. 268.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 6, no. 200; 5, nos. 45–58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 5, nos. 66–67.

## MIND-BODY RELATION

Earlier in this article I proposed that this hypothesis of an intrinsic dialectical relationship between spirit and matter could possibly shed new light on the mind-body problem and on Christian belief in life after death and the resurrection of the body. First of all, with respect to the mind-body problem, it seems clear that the ontological dualism implicit in the classical understanding of mind and body could thereby be finally laid to rest. For, mind and body are then not two different realities, as Descartes proposed following the lead of Plato.<sup>23</sup> Nor are they to be understood as form and matter as Aquinas suggested following the lead of Aristotle.<sup>24</sup> Rather, they are two dialectically related dimensions of one and the same physical reality at all levels of existence and activity within Nature. Thus the higher forms of mental activity should logically be emergent out of matter when the latter is properly conditioned to sustain that degree of interaction. As William Hasker suggests, this is where more recent discussion of the mind-body problem seems to be headed but what is still lacking is a better understanding of what is meant by “emergence.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet, as already mentioned, if one thinks of Whiteheadian “societies” as structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions, and if these fields are hierarchically ordered in terms of their complexity, then an explanation of “emergence” within physical reality seems ready at hand. For, according to this scheme, Whiteheadian “creativity” not only enables the constituent actual occasions of a given “society” to achieve “satisfaction” in their individual self-constitution; it likewise empowers them collectively to co-create a “common element of form” for themselves as a “society” that is analogous to but still different from the form proper to the self-constitution of each of them individually.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, as I have explained in more detail elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> this pattern or common element of form for the society as a whole gradually undergoes modification in virtue of the ever-changing relations among its successive actual occasions in their interaction with one another and the surrounding environment. Then, when a significant change in the “common element of form” for the society

<sup>23</sup> See William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1999) 147–61.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 161–70.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 171–203.

<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, this is probably not what Whitehead himself had in mind with his description of “societies” in *Process and Reality* 34–35. But it seems necessary to make this revision in his metaphysical scheme in order to avoid philosophical atomism and thereby to establish the objective unity of a “society” as more than the aggregate of its constituent actual occasions.

<sup>27</sup> Bracken, *The One in the Many* 157–78; also “Emergent Monism and the Classical Doctrine of the Soul,” *Zygon* 39 (2004) 161–74.

as a whole has taken hold, a more complex set of actual occasions that can effectively incorporate that change of form into their individual self-constitution will likewise necessarily originate. Thus through this reciprocal relation between the constituent actual occasions of a given society and the “common element of form” governing their dynamic interrelation, a new level of existence and activity within Nature can by degrees emerge.

The advantage of this scheme, as I see it, is that it theoretically justifies both “bottom-up” and “top-down” causation within Nature. In each case, the agents for change are the constituent actual occasions of a given society. Insofar as they continue to evolve in their dynamic interrelations as a result of their mutual “prehension” of an ever-changing natural environment and quite possibly in terms of what Whitehead calls a divine “initial aim,”<sup>28</sup> the constituent actual occasions of a given “society” gradually re-shape their “common element of form.” But when this form is sufficiently different from its predecessor forms within the same society, then the form by its objective novelty becomes the occasion for the emergence of a new higher-order set of actual occasions able toprehend it fully and thereby make it the basis for their individual self-constitution. In this way, as Whitehead himself proposes in *Process and Reality*,<sup>29</sup> there are qualitatively different grades of actual occasions corresponding to their internal complexity. Whitehead himself, to be sure, only specified four such grades; but there could be many more, given the presupposition of successively more complex societies or structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions within Nature.

Applying this line of thought to the mind-brain relation, we can then with Whitehead argue that the mind is a “living person” or nexus of high-grade actual occasions with a “thread of personal order,” equivalently a “common element of form” from moment to moment.<sup>30</sup> Thus, on the one hand, the mind depends for its existence and activity upon the brain when the latter is understood as a complex field of activity for neuronal actual occasions that in their own self-constitution are influenced by still other actual occasions within the various subordinate “societies” or structured fields of activity throughout the rest of the body. On the other hand, the mind reciprocally influences what happens in the brain and the rest of the body in that its form or pattern of self-constitution is at every moment “prehended” first by the neuronal actual occasions and then by all the other actual occasions at work within the human person. Equivalently, then, the mind as the top-level nexus of actual occasions within a human being presides over the overall structured field of activity proper to the

<sup>28</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 244.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 119–20; 177–78.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 107.



human body as a whole and subtly affects the functioning of all the subordinate fields of activity and their constituent actual occasions contained therein.<sup>31</sup>

### IMMORTALITY AND RESURRECTION

Yet, if the mind, the brain and the rest of the body are so closely intertwined, how is it possible to think of the subjective immortality of the mind (soul) and the resurrection of the body in terms of this scheme? I will lay out my answer to that question in four steps. First of all, if one accepts the line of argument proposed earlier about the dialectical relationship between spirit and matter, then it follows that the human body as a material reality is not opposed to the reality of spirit but is its necessary self-expression or self-manifestation.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, the way in which the body is the self-expression of mind or spirit is to exist from moment to moment as a complex structured field of activity for all the “decisions” made by the actual occasions contained within it. Thirdly, this limited field of activity for a single bodily reality is continually being incorporated first into the much larger field of activity proper to its natural environment (ultimately creation as a whole) and then into the unlimited field of activity proper to God as divine Spirit. In this way, the body as a finite field of activity is from moment to moment incorporated into the field of activity proper to God and thereby achieves at every moment objective immortality within God.

To spell this out in more detail, if God be understood in trinitarian terms as three divine subjects of experience who together co-constitute an all-encompassing field of activity structured by their ongoing relationality to one another, then this divine field of activity or divine matrix likewise serves both as the point of origin and the ultimate goal of creation. All created actual occasions, in other words, come forth from God in virtue of a divine “initial aim” that empowers them to initiate a process of self-constitution within the space-time continuum. Upon making the “decision” that completes their process of self-constitution, the actual occasions perish as finite subjects of experience. But the form or pattern of their self-constitution together with the subjective feelings accompanying that pattern are incorporated first into the structured field of activity proper to the

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 108–9.

<sup>32</sup> See also on this point Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Portland, Ore.: Sussex Academic, 1999) 24: “co-extensive with its outside, everything has an inside” (24); likewise, Karl Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem*, trans. W. T. O’Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965) 57, where he refers to matter as “solidified spirit” and notes that both matter and spirit are different manifestations of the act of being.

creaturely “societies” to which they belong and then into the divine structured field of activity that serves as the ontological matrix or ground of being for creation. Thus, objective immortality for creaturely actual occasions is assured because they are consciously or (more likely) unconsciously contributing at every moment to the gradual building-up of what the New Testament calls the kingdom of God, the ontological reality jointly being created by the divine persons and all their creatures from time immemorial.

Thus far, however, my argument only provides for the objective immortality of creaturely actual occasions within God much as for Whitehead creaturely actual occasions are everlastingly preserved within the “divine consequent nature.”<sup>33</sup> How creaturely actual occasions achieve subjective immortality within God requires a fourth step in the argument. Here I propose that whenever a given “society” of actual occasions comes to an end, then the final actual occasion (or set of actual occasions in the case of “societies” extended in space as well as time) is received into the divine life as a subjective as well as objective reality. That is, whereas all previous actual occasions within the society in question expired and only left a trace of their subjective reality in the shape of a feeling-laden form or pattern for the ongoing development of the field of activity proper to the society as a whole, the final actual occasion (or set of actual occasions) retains its subjectivity within God and thereby takes possession of its own objective reality as a “society” in a new way. It experiences the complex pattern of its entire previous existence as preserved directly within its own field of activity from the beginning of its existence and indirectly within the all-encompassing divine field of activity. It thus undergoes “resurrection” into a new form of existence and activity that was impossible within the constraints of the space-time continuum but is now made possible through incorporation into the ongoing life of the triune God.

Several years ago Marjorie Suchocki developed a similar theory to justify subjective immortality for created actual occasions within God. She stipulated that for every created actual occasion there is a fleeting moment of “enjoyment” after it has completed its process of self-constitution and before it perishes so as to become a “superject” for subsequent actual occasions toprehend.<sup>34</sup> Precisely at that moment of subjective enjoyment God “prehends” the actual occasion and thereby incorporates it as a subjective as well as objective reality within the divine life or divine consequent nature.<sup>35</sup> The principal liability of this otherwise clever reinterpretation

<sup>33</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 344–51.

<sup>34</sup> See above, n. 10.

<sup>35</sup> In defense of her thesis, Suchocki must likewise affirm that God “prehends” past actual occasions differently than created actual occasions. God prehends actual

tation of Whitehead's metaphysics, however, is that every created actual occasion that has ever existed is thereby preserved within the divine consequent nature in its individuality. It is, to be sure, interrelated with every other actual occasion that has ever existed, but what seems to be lost is its particular reality as a momentary member of a specific created "society" of actual occasions within the divine consequent nature.<sup>36</sup> Particularly for human beings this would seem to imply a loss of self-identity as a person or enduring "society" of actual occasions with a special pattern of behavior or mode of existence.

Precisely for this reason I stipulated above that only the final actual occasion (or set of actual occasions) within a given creaturely "society" needs to be incorporated subjectively as well as objectively within the divine life in order for the "society" as a whole to enjoy subjective immortality. To experience "resurrection" within God a created "society" needs only its current actual occasion (or set of actual occasions) at the time of its demise to be subjectively incorporated into the divine life. That single subject of experience (or single set of actual occasions) provides the necessary subjective focus for the "society" as a whole to become aware of itself as a unified reality in a new way within God. No further "decisions" as to its growth or development are needed since the life-history of the "society" within the space-time continuum has come to an end. But in and through its final member (or members) the "society" as a whole continues to grow in its appreciation and evaluation of its contribution to an ontological reality much greater than itself, namely, the kingdom of God. Some-

---

occasions fully in their subjectivity as well as their objectivity; created actual occasions only partially apprehend their predecessors in terms of the latter's objectivity or availability for their own self-constitution (see, *The End of Evil* 168–69 [n. 17]). My own belief is that subjectivity as such cannot be objectified or "prehended" even by God. But the three divine persons can incorporate a finite subjectivity into their own divine life simply by receiving that actual occasion into communion with themselves. Incorporation into the divine life, in other words, is based on love, not knowledge. Genuine love is possible only when subjectivities are different from one another and yet where both subjectivities seek union with one another.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 107–8. See also Jones, *Intensity* 107–9. She proposes that the actual occasions constitutive of a society have a greater intensity of feeling toward one another than toward actual occasions belonging to other societies: "The individual entities of a society would not have the intensities they do without the massiveness of emphasis provided by the collective of entities in genetic relationship. In other words, the society provides the environment that is procurative of the desired intensity" (107). I agree but likewise contend that this "environment" is in fact an objectively existing field of activity structured by the ongoing interrelationship of those same actual occasions. Hence, there is no need for the individual actual occasions to co-create by a process of "transmutation" from moment to moment "the common element of form" needed for the "feeling" of corporate identity (108).

what as Suchocki comments with respect to individual actual occasions, there is for such redeemed “societies” within the divine life an ever-growing sense of “transformation, redemption and peace.”<sup>37</sup>

## TWO CLASSICAL PROBLEMS

There are, of course, still other details that could be added to fill out this picture of a created universe that is everlastingly being preserved within the divine life, but many of them have been developed elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> For the purposes of this article, I will add only two that deal specifically with Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. The first has to do with the fact that the body of a human being changes dramatically in the course of a normal lifetime. One develops from a tiny infant to a growing child to a young adult to a middle-aged adult to an old person afflicted with various physical disabilities. Which body, therefore, will a human being possess at the moment of resurrection? St. Paul, to be sure, talks about a “spiritual body” rather than a reanimated corpse (1 Corinthians 15:44). But how is one to understand a spiritual body that somehow spans all the physical changes of a normal lifetime? Yet, if one concedes that the human body and the bodies of all other living things are finite fields of activity structured by the “decisions” of their constituent actual occasions from the beginning of life in this world, then in principle the actual occasions present within the body at the moment of death will be able to grasp their entire past history in the structure and feeling-tone of their own field of activity and then experience a strong sense of rebirth or fresh beginning through incorporation into the divine field of activity. One will thus be physically complete for the first time through active participation with other creatures in the ongoing life of the three divine persons. Here too, therefore, there will be an analogous feeling of “transformation, redemption and peace” for the actual occasions constitutive of the body as well as for the actual occasion ultimately constitutive of the soul for human beings and other animal organisms.

The second issue deserving of discussion here is the question of when this resurrection of the body will take place. Will it happen immediately after death or only at the end of the world? St. Paul and other first-century Christians thought that the end of the world was imminent. When it subsequently became clear that this was not going to happen, Christian philosophers and theologians were faced with the question of the status of people who die before the end of the world. Are they already in heaven or are they asleep in their graves, awaiting the Second Coming of Christ?

<sup>37</sup> Suchocki, *The End of Evil* 109.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Bracken, “Emergent Monism and the Classical Doctrine of the Soul” 170–72; also “Intersubjectivity and the Coming of God,” *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003) 381–400, esp. 397–400.

Once again, an answer is available in terms of the metaphysical scheme offered above. If actual occasions upon completion of their process of self-constitution perish and leave the trace of their subjective activity first upon the field of activity proper to their own finite "society" of actual occasions and then upon the infinite field of activity proper to the divine persons, then there is every reason to believe that resurrection takes place at the moment of death when the final actual occasions constitutive of the soul and the body become for the first time fully aware of their historical identity, their simultaneous participation both in time and eternity from the beginning of their life in this world. At the same time, given the presumed qualitative difference between time and eternity (that is, that eternity is not simply unending time but rather the complete interpenetration of past, present, and future<sup>39</sup>), it seems altogether plausible that at the moment of death human beings and all other living creatures will find themselves at the end of history rather than somewhere in the middle, already enjoying the Last Judgment and the inauguration of a new cosmic epoch as promised in the pages of the New Testament.

These are, of course, speculative issues that can never be settled simply by appeal to logic or philosophical argument. But they do make clear the pertinence of my basic thesis that spirit and matter are not separate realities but dialectically related dimensions of one and the same physical reality. As Whitehead and Peirce each in his own way has made clear, it is time to set aside the ontological dualism that has bedeviled philosophers from the time of Plato onwards and encouraged natural scientists and others of a more empirical bent simply to write off the reality of spirit and to focus exclusively on the world of material reality. Rather, we should be, as Peirce recommends, "objective idealists," recognizing the ontological primacy of mind or spirit over matter but likewise acknowledging that spirit at all levels of existence and activity (including the divine) must somehow express itself in terms of matter. Yet the term "matter" must then be reconceived or imagined in a new way, namely, as a combination of form and feeling (information and energy) rather than as some primordial stuff passively awaiting an infusion of spirit in order to become some determinate reality. Such a basic change in world view should have far-reaching consequences not just in the realm of religion but in many other areas of human life.

<sup>39</sup> See Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., "A New Look at Time and Eternity," *Theology and Science* 2 (2004) 77–88. See also Kathryn Tanner, "Eschatology without a Future?," *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, ed. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000) 222–37. She argues that creation and eschatology as such have nothing to do with the beginning or end of the physical world but with our relationship to God as the source and goal of our lives on earth.



#### Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

#### About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.