

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD'S PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

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The most notable feature in process philosophy is its unique way of looking at reality. It claims that behind every thing there inheres a reeling creative process -- a creative work in progress. Supposing that this is true, the whole of reality is never static but dynamic. Accordingly, what operates in the dynamic scheme of things is nothing else but the creative novelty brought about by a constructive act of creativity.

Whitehead upholds the same process philosophy in his masterpiece *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. His trailblazing project is the first cosmological metaphysics which adopts the theories conjured up in quantum physics stipulating that the "appearance of the electron jumps from occasion to occasion ... not the same electron that disappears and reappears, but one electron perishes and another comes into being" (Wallack, 1980 : 206). In fact, some scientists have admitted that in the light of quantum physics, they have discovered that atoms are "dynamic, [and are composed of] undulating structures, which often remind one of waves than of pellets, and within which occur many sorts of strange events" (De Schrijver, 260). This scientific discovery suggests that the cosmos is basically experienced as perpetually undergoing an ascending spiral of changing, becoming, and evolving. This view surely dismantles the long-standing belief and adherence to the determinate and mechanistic laws of nature.

The foregoing discussion on Whitehead's process philosophy, its theistic and religious import, begins by patiently going through relatively detailed account on the four major metaphysical concepts involved therein such as eternal objects, actual entities, God, and creativity.

Eternal Objects

Whitehead's Eternal Objects is the fifth of eight categories of existence consisting of objective and the subjective species. In its primordial sense, the objective species relates particularly to the

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mathematical Platonic forms whereby their realities are comprehensible even apart from any reference to particular occasions of experience. Mathematics has become Whitehead's model with the view that in its peculiar system "it is possible to move from elementary postulates to remote conclusions with no gaps, no surds, no inexplicables encountered beyond the original assumptions" (Kraus, 1979 : 30). Insofar as one's understanding of the "connexity of mathematical objects is translated into a metaphysics of forms, it yields valuable insights into the nature and relation of the abstract values or patterns in terms of which entities are structured" (Ibid.). Some commentaries have argued that the Platonic forms are independent existents -- they exist by themselves and that they do not depend upon any actualities. While this interpretation might be true in Plato's philosophical method, it appears that Whitehead wants to posit a contrasting theory. He believes that mathematics as objective species of eternal objects must entail certain degree of concreteness because for him "the precise ontological status of a mathematical eternal object is that of a potential relationship for entities in the world" (Ford and Kline, 1983: 24). In the event that this potential relationship is fully realized its effects are visibly ascertainable in the things of the physical world.

The objective species of eternal objects which are essentially related to the actual world perform as agents in objectification. Objectification is the manner in which an individual subject intends to incorporate a past datum of experience to form part of the materials required for a creative synthesis in the process of concrescence. To objectify means toprehend certain antecedently given data out of which a consequent actuality derives its being. Through the eternal objects the antecedent occasions are objectified. It happens when the subject selects an eternal object and applies it to such an antecedent occasion. For Whitehead, eternal objects involve "emotions, pleasures, pains, aversions, adversions, color, sounds, tastes, smells, hardness, thoughts, drunkenness, heat, and elephantness" (Ibid., 113). They are pure potentialities and once they are integrated into the existence of an actual occasion they constitute the forms of such and such an actual occasion. The "objectified antecedent occasions are occasions as *felt*, as experienced by their successors" (Ibid., 106). But the manner in which an individual occasion feels its antecedent occasion is subject to the individual occasion's prerogative in selecting the type of eternal objects to be applied in the act of objectification.

The subjective species, in its primary character, deals with the specific manner in which a subject appropriates an objective datum of

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experience as antecedent. As one component of eternal objects, it functions to characterize both the subjective form and the objective datum of a subject. Here, the "subject decides how its antecedents will be simplified, conceived, described, and interpreted for itself on the basis of its own purposes in synthesizing them" (Ibid., 108-109). The act of synthesizing is geared towards ingression -- one which results into the creation of a novel actuality in the world.

Whitehead uses emotion as one of the prototypes of subjective species. Emotion is an eternal object not exclusively taken to mean as a pure form of abstraction but one which necessitates concrete relation with the actual existence in the world. It is difficult, if not absurd, to imagine happiness simply as an idea. It has to be felt concretely for more meaningful impact in one's experience. It is one of the innumerable items of definite subjective form of emotion that a subject might feel in relation to any particular objective datum. The subject objectifies this datum as something that renders him a pleasant feeling. It evokes a happy response. The subjective eternal object of happiness is what determines both the objective datum (prehended as pleasurable) and the subjective form (the happy emotional response) of the successor. The successor has felt its antecedent as a pleasing one and has responded with a happy feeling. Happiness, being experienced here (as an emotional response), defines the subjective feeling of the individual.

Aside from the objective and subjective species of eternal objects, Whitehead suggests that each of the eternal objects has to be "comprehended by acquaintance with (i) its particular individuality, (ii) its general relationships to other eternal objects as apt for realization in actual occasion, and (iii) the general principle which expresses its ingression in particular actual occasions" (1927 : 229). These three interrelated characteristics of an eternal object reveal two important insights. The first argues that "each eternal object is an individual which, in its own peculiar fashion, is what it is" (Ibid.). This argument implies that an eternal object as a condition for the possibility of actuality is endowed with its own individual and unique identity wholly distinct from others. In view of its uniqueness, the individual eternal object provides a definite identity to a concrete actuality reflective of the eternal object's unique quality. The violetness and the fragrance of an actual orchid, for instance, are two specific attributes which describe the quality of the said flower among many possibilities of colors, scents and other items of eternal objects. They are

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two species of eternal objects which are specifically distinct and unique from each other.

The second metaphysical insight claims that "an eternal object, considered as an abstract entity, cannot be divorced from its reference to other eternal objects, and from its reference to actuality generally; though it is disconnected from its actual modes of ingression into definite actual occasions" (Ibid., 1927 : 230). The eternal objects are not isolated entities from one another; rather, they are mutually related.

As shown above, the variety of colors are related to one another by virtue of their being pure potentialities. This same line of reasoning also holds true to scents, feelings, shapes, among others. The violetness and the fragrance of an orchid do not alienate them from other specific colors and scents which might come upon this or that particular orchid and several other orchids. Concerning the necessary relation between the eternal objects and actualities, Whitehead has emphatically stressed that the universe, including all the things therein, is a byproduct of the creative relation between the eternal objects and actual entities. Without this relation, nothing is concrete in existence, in the first place. The eternal objects, being purely conceptual, bear no meaning at all if they are totally divorced from actuality. Thus, one cannot know what rectangle is by merely contemplating rectangleness; one can find rectangular objects only in the sensible physical world (Christian, 1959: 206). The actual occasions, which are discernible through physical prehension, can never be actual apart from the eternal objects precisely because every actuality is a synthesis of the creative relations among the data of the past, present, and future with eternal objects as their forms. Thus, conceptual and physical prehension must always go together. Whitehead says "I am maintaining that the understanding of actuality requires a reference to ideality" (1927 : 228). By this he means that whatever is actual cannot in any way be divorced from the potential. Therefore, temporal things come into being through their participation in the things eternal (Ibid., 1959 : 63).

Eternal objects are considered objects by reason of their being an antecedently given data (existing in the realm of concepts) out of which a novel actual existence derives its possible forms of being (Barineau, 78). As items of possibilities, their primary function is to confer definite identity to each and every actual entity.

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Actual Entities

The book *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* straightforwardly pronounces that "the universe is made up of particular actual entities (and their conglomerates) that creatively interact among themselves instead of merely complying with the workings of general laws of nature" (De Shrijver, 256). The actual entities refer practically to all concrete beings existing in the real sense which purportedly include "subatomic particle, atom, molecule, and in a wider sense, also for a living organism, from the lowest to the highest kinds" (Ibid., 256). Existent beings like rocks, plants, tables, chairs, planets, brutes, human beings, etc. are definite manifestations of actual entities.

The individual actual entity, as empirically existing, is interchangeable with what Whitehead calls actual occasion to signify that an actual entity is an event, and a process not a static congealed substance. Every actual occasion originates from something; it does not come out of nothing. Its existence is a result of a creative synthesis of the objective data derived from the past (as efficient causation) and the subjective aim (as final causation) constituting the internal structure of the subject. The objective data were once actual occasions which have perished subjectively but stayed on as objectively immortal. They are called objective data or antecedent data because they are given in experience which have positive contribution or potential efficacy for the birth of a new actual occasion. They are received and assimilated in the light of one's subjective aim. Once this procedure is completed, a creative synthesis of the multiplicity of occasions will eventually lead to the emergence of a new actual occasion.

As a process, the act of creative synthesis is conceivable only through prehension. Prehension means to "'grasp' some other entity (actual or conceptual) and makes that entity an object of its experience" (Wallack, 12). It is classified into positive and negative. It is positive when an antecedent data being perceived are included to form part of the materials necessary for the concrescence of a potential actual occasion. It is negative when the antecedent data are excluded or discarded when they are found irrelevant.

Once the objective data are incorporated into the concrescing occasion through positive prehension, they automatically form part of the definiteness of the said concrescing occasion. The prehension of objective data involves the prehension of eternal objects which are ingressed in them

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since these objective data are viewed with certain definiteness either in terms of their shape, color, feeling, scent, among others.

Moreover, the act of prehension requires a prehending subject. The latter is the concreting occasion endowed with subjective immediacy or self-creative capacity. This self-creative capacity directs the objective data for the becoming of the subject into a complete actual occasion. It involves the power to choose which among the past data are to be assimilated for its becoming. Alongside with its power for inclusion and exclusion, it has also the capacity to direct itself towards a desired goal known as subjective aim. Subjective aim is held as the final causality of an actual entity since it seeks to determine the goal which the subject envisions to accomplish. It is responsible in the making of the potentiality of an actual occasion realizable. It also makes possible the union of the past events and the eternal objects which results into the creation of a new occasion. The subjective aim "lures the diverse feelings into ingressing certain eternal objects appropriate to all the feelings as a unity" (Ibid.). According to Whitehead, "the subject is nothing more than this subjective aim shared by many feelings, enabling them to concreate into one feeling" (Ibid., 120-121). This then leads to the view that the individual is nothing else but the creative union of the various feelings.

Before an actual occasion becomes completely actual it has to pass through the stage of concreting. Concreting is a "process in which a number of prehensions grow together into a unity of a complete actual entity" (Ford and Kline, 36). It is the movement from potentiality to concreteness. The concreting of a prospective complete actual occasion involves yet another complex process. This complex process is none other than the transition of the succession of one actual occasion by another actual occasion. As the concreting occasion receives the objective data together with their eternal objects, these data will be integrated into the subjective aim of the concreting occasion (also, together with its own eternal objects constituting the ideal vision). When all of these are combined together, a new synthesis will emerge which in turn will result into the birth of a new actual and complete occasion. After a while, the newly completed actual occasion will perish subjectively as it recedes into the state of objective immortality.

Whitehead's Concept of God

Whitehead introduces the idea of God in order to account for the origin of novelty taking place in the cosmos. He presumes that novelty indicates the existence of God who is seen as the ground of the cosmic order. Whitehead thinks of God as "that entity which mediates between temporal actualities and eternal objects" (Barineau, 84). God is the ground by which the interfusion of actuality and potentiality -- actuality participates in potentiality and potentiality enters into actuality -- is fully materialized. God is the "actual and eternal basis for the eternal objects" (Collins, 1959 : 319). Without God underlying it, the actual world could have never assumed its concrete existence at all. God's capacity to forge the partnership between eternal objects and actual entities is discernible within the framework of his arguably three distinct but inalienable natures, namely, primordial, consequent, and superjective nature. They are the three natures in one immortal God.

The primordial nature of God is purely conceptual, untouchable by the famous Newtonian coordinates of space and time. It is a state of God's being characterized by its timeless and non-temporal entity. Existing as purely conceptual, God is viewed to be a divine mind capable of grasping all eternal objects in one instance. In such an all-encompassing mental operation it allows no single eternal object to escape from his memory.¹ In this intellectual mode of existence, God's mind organizes, gradates, and adjusts "the eternal objects, both to attain the full esthetic satisfaction of God's subjective aim and to render them accessible to temporal entities" (Ibid., 320). Metaphorically speaking, God as *res cogitans* "acts like a mathematician who explores new combinations and solutions as yet not realized but possibly realizable in the world of becoming" (De Schrijver, 261). It is here that "God reflects on the coherence of logically possible evolutions of the universe among other universes" (De Schrijver, 261). This aspect of God is complete and infinite since it is devoid of any negative prehensions. In his subjective form, God is impersonal and unconscious because he

is unmoved by love for this particular, or that particular,
In the foundations of his being, God is indifferent alike
 to preservation and to novelty. He cares not whether an

¹The term memory here should not be construed as data of past events stored in God's mind since everything in God is ever present -- he stands beyond time in his mental pole.

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future" (Collins, 321). In religious language, "this final phase in the divine function is symbolized as the providence, love, and fellow suffering of God with mankind" (Ibid.). Finally,

God alone (in His primordial nature) has a complete grasp of the eternal objects; He alone (in His consequent nature) can incorporate objective data without permitting them to fade into a past; He alone (in His superjective nature) can make His experience accessible to other actual entities without perishing Himself. (Ibid.)

The Category of Creativity

Whitehead sees process as the fundamental feature of the cosmos. Process means the becoming of actual entities in concrete fashion. Creativity is the principle that underlies its becoming. It is the term used to describe the general phenomenon in which the data of other actual entities are being appropriated in order to engender new actual entities. In itself, creativity is not an actuality but the dynamic energy which makes actuality actual. Without creativity, no actuality is possible; but creativity without actuality is self-contradictory. Thus, they are inseparably related since "creativity is needed to bring entities into concrete existence, while entities are needed to give form and definiteness to the amorphous flux of creative activity" (Ford and Kline, 233).

Jorge Luis Nobo contends that Whitehead's creativity "can manifest itself either transcendently, as in transition, or immanently, as in concrescence" (1986 : 131). The first is known as the process of transition or macroscopic process, while the second is called the process of concrescence or microscopic process. The bone of contention is that the becoming of every actual entity always entails the interconnected processes of transition and concrescence. The process of transition directs the mechanism of "passing on" the objective data of past actual entities to the emerging new actual entity. The transmission occurs if the emerging actual entity receives and conforms to the antecedently given objective data. These objective data are the efficient causation in which the concrescing entity is partly constituted because the moment that they are conformed, they hitherto form part of the subject's initial character. Here, creativity as the principle of transition, assumes as a receptacle out of which the past occasions are being stored. From the preserved data, creativity functions anew as the principle behind the appropriation of past actual entities to the present. This is why creativity is regarded as the ultimate explanation of the

world has significantly influenced God. The storing of the events in the world in God's memory is a metaphysical necessity because through that God is able to have a conscious enjoyment of the realization (or non-realization) of his subjective aim for the world.

On the other hand, the idealizing function of God's consequent nature is to impart to each actual entity "an ideal counterpart whereby its value is enhanced in God's experience" (Ford and Kline, 196). Once the actualities of the world are received by God, they are integrated again into his ideal vision to further enhance their value so that a more harmonious order in the universe shall be effected.

The superjective nature of God represents the third phase of his divine function. It is the third since apparently it logically follows after the second -- God's consequent nature. It can be recalled that in the consequent nature, God systematically preserves the events in the world by receiving and storing them in his memory. Once they are received by God, they will be made pure and perfect (as far as possible) by his creative vision of an ideal possibilities for the world (Ford and Kline, 197). God hauls together all the eternal objects and combines them with the stored events in order to come up with an esthetic synthesis that could possibly constitute a novel occasion in the world. This esthetic synthesis in God's mind essentially coheres with his subjective aim. God's subjective aim is no less than his infinite vision directed towards the production of an ideal possibility of value. When this is done, it becomes an object for the subjects in the world, thereby making it the superject. This is to say that the vision of God for the actual world "becomes an object for the prehension of emergent actual occasions, and Whitehead refers to this objective efficacy of God as the superject nature" (Barineau, 87). It is clear that the causal efficacy of the consequent nature of God on the universe defines his superjective nature.

In Whitehead's words, "the 'superjective' nature of God is the character of the pragmatic value of his specific satisfaction qualifying the transcendent creativity in the various temporal instances" (1960: 135). The pragmatic value bespeaks the practical significance of God's specific satisfaction or ideal vision for the world which is composed of various temporal instances. Consequently, this practical significance qualifies or reveals the reality of such a transcendent creativity. God, through his superjective nature, "pours back fresh depths of significance into the world, enabling actual entities to gain a new facet of ideal vision for meeting their

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future" (Collins, 321). In religious language, "this final phase in the divine function is symbolized as the providence, love, and fellow suffering of God with mankind" (Ibid.). Finally,

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In summary, Whitehead's "ontological principle asserts that each
ta. actual entity is partly the outcome of a process of efficient causation [or
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d, (Nobo, 43). The individual actual entity's past data (as efficient causation)
s and his subjective aim (as final causation) fashion out as mere passive
t determinants since they are virtually incapable of producing new actuality if
they are left on their own. They need creativity's spark for ignition.
Creativity becomes the driving force which actualizes the "ultimacy of the

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interrelated creative processes of transition and concrescence" (Ibid., 131). It accounts for the order of the entire cosmos.

The Religious Significance of Whitehead's Process Philosophy

The preceding discussions reveal that "eternal objects, actual occasions and God are all related to one another in a general process of becomingness" (Barineau, 90). This same process (which moves from transition to concrescence), is the most basic of all reality operating in the entire cosmos. It is so that nothing could ever exist concretely apart from it.

Whitehead's process philosophy is rich with meaning. Its profundity summons a welter of possible implications. One of these which attract a good number of adherents is the widely accepted view that Whitehead's God can, in no way, be a God of religion because the metaphysically demonstrable God of Whitehead depicts a wholly impersonal God. Even Whitehead's discovery of God's primordial, consequent, and superjective natures does not guarantee that God truly cares for the individual subjects; he might just be interested only in conserving and producing value that he alone can enjoy. The God of religion is thought to be a personal God; one who shows benevolence, love, and compassion to all mankind. Moreover, the God of religion stands above and beyond reason -- he is only accessible through some kind of intuition or plain faith. The criticism insinuates that the God of religion is irreconcilably alien from the God postulated in Whitehead's metaphysics.

I propose a quite different formulation of implication and an alternative point of view: Whitehead's God can have a religious significance because there are positive indications that He can be an object of worship.

Worship is a divine and religious expression of giving honor or showing reverence to a supreme being commonly known as God. Specifically, in the case of "Judaism and Christianity, and in most other religions, divine worship is the highest expression of faith and devotion, and its chief component is prayer or praise" (Grant, 1988 : 536). For Charles Hartshorne, it involves "the *integrating* of all one's thoughts and purposes, all valuations and meanings, all perceptions and conceptions" (1989: 4-5). Simply put, worship entails wholeness of individual response to the call of God towards living a productive and creative life.

Ibid., 13. Hartshorne offers two theories of worship: theistic and non-theistic. The theistic theory, on the one hand, upholds that "the conscious wholeness of the individual is correlative to an inclusive wholeness in the world of which the individual is aware, and this wholeness is deity" (Ibid., 7: 5). On the other hand, the non-theistic form of worship, denies the existence of such an inclusive wholeness. If, by some stroke of chance, it happens to exist, the non-theist would like to point out that it can never be related to a religious deity (Ibid., 6). The non-theistic theory of worship is completely resolved in assigning this perceived inclusive wholeness or creative novelty to "the Unknown, or Nature as a Great Mystery, not to be thought of as conscious, or as an individual in principle superior to all others" (Ibid.).

Taking the cue from Hartshorne's theory, I have observed, in Whitehead's process philosophy, three interconnected key concepts collaborating as elements of worship, namely the divine lure, prehension, and creativity. They are elements of worship because they provide the actual entities of the feeling and the experience of the fascinating presence of God in the universe. Since worship is the integration of all one's thoughts and purposes, all valuations and meanings, all perceptions and conceptions, then whatever elements which pave the way towards the realization of God's honor and glory are, in themselves, elements of worship.

The first element is the divine lure. The lure is divine because it proceeds from God, who is himself a divine actuality. We know that in his primordial nature, God formulates the best of all possible combinations of ideal values and desires them to materialize in the world through the actual entities. But since the actual entities are endowed with the freedom to choose, God does not force them to do his divine will blindly. Respecting and valuing the freedom of the subjects, God influences them as a matter of invitation or enticement, thereby providing them the opportunity to freely respond. His proposal of the ideal alternative for the world flows out from His loving initiative being offered as a lure, rather than a forceful coercion.

The second element has something to do with the actual entity's inherent capacity toprehend God's best combination of possibilities for the world. As the second element of worship, prehension is very important since the individual is able to know that there is such and such an invitation. The recognition of God's invitation does not stop as sheer physical and

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mental cognition; it involves a conscious, affirmative decision on the part of the prehending subject. This affirmative decision is free and inspired by faith when the subjects themselves elected to acknowledge God's divine presence in the cosmos. In prehension, the actual entities are conferred with the faculty to be sensitive to the unconcealment of the sacred in the universe. It is a gift of vision which enables them to behold the cosmos as a "grandiose spectacle of the self-giving of the Creator and the outpouring of the Spirit in so many creative events" (De Shrijver, 276). At this juncture, the subjects -- in and through prehension -- experience the divine goal that God has set for the world.

The third and last element of worship deals with creativity. It proceeds from the subjects' holistic response to God's invitation, following the subjects' prehension of God's divine lure. It energizes the faithful to perform a consciously unitary or creative response to God in the form of prayer and worship. While God is the ultimate source of creativity, God also calls everyone to share creatively in his inventive creativity to make this world a better place to live in.

To view God as the ultimate source of creativity is to look up to him in worship. In worship God is seen as the "lord over possibility as well as actuality" (Hartshorne, 1967 : 78). God is worshipful because he is the ultimate source of creativity where all actualities are summoned to participate in his grace. Worship is a creative response to the mystery of God. It is celebrated with reverence, awe, wonder, and love. And loving God is an experience of faith.

Lastly, the interconnected processual operations of the three elements of worship (divine lure, prehension, and creativity) can be summarized in the following: The becoming of God as an object of worship begins by revealing himself to mankind through his ideal vision for the world. God's offering of the most valuable outcome manifests only in the form of a lure or invitation since human beings are free entities. The ideals being offered are known to man by means of prehension which essentially involves faith. The prehended lure constitutes the subject's religious experience which, in turn, becomes the source of inspiration for worship. As the subject receives and obeys God's divine will, he is then drawn into performing a unitary or creative response which the religious calls an act of worship. More concretely, using De Shrijver's example, it can be said that the "DNA-formula became what it is because God lured the biochemical elements, formative of it, to their search for finding the 'magic

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ula;' to this lure they have responded creatively in accordance to their
'tone of feeling'" (De Shrijver, 262).

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