

Alfred North Whitehead's Metaphysical  
System And God's Position In It

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## INTRODUCTION

Alfred North Whitehead was born in 1861 in Ramsgate, Kent. He was first a mathematician; he taught at the University of London. One of his most well-known works is Principia Mathematica, in the writing of which he collaborated with Bertrand Russell. Secondly, he was a philosopher of science. The Concepts of Nature was his expression of this interest in natural science. In 1924, Whitehead went to Harvard University where he joined the faculty as professor of philosophy. It is here that he formulated his organic philosophy. With this philosophy he tried to unite all the different components of the world. He is said to have fused empiricism and rationalism with this philosophy.

The first chapter of this paper gives the basic concepts of Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism. A certain amount of his cosmology and epistemology must be explored in order to see the significance of the second and more important chapter on God's place in Whitehead's system. God has reserved for himself a special place in all philosophies down through the ages and it is interesting to see just how Whitehead handles God.

One basic problem in reading Whitehead is the barrier his language sets up. One can never be very sure of precisely what Whitehead means because he uses terms in different ways at different times. Too many ordinary words Whitehead has

attached a different meaning. Then at times, Whitehead simply contradicts himself, unless his intent is to twist the meaning of a word for one isolated case which is doubtful. Whitehead was aware of this language problem. He himself thought language was inadequate. He said that language requires an imaginative leap for its understanding.<sup>1</sup> He seemed well aware of this problem from the beginning, but never really worried too much about it. He appeared to be willing to write within the inadequacies of his language. The result of all this is the complexity involved in comprehending what Whitehead wrote.

Despite the inadequacies, we can still appreciate Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism. This paper is an effort to do so. I can only hope to explore and present Whitehead for what he is worth, pointing up some of his strengths and some of his inconsistencies. The accent is on God's position, which can only be considered after attaining some understanding of his metaphysics.

## I. THE PHILOSOPHY OF ORGANISM

### Whitehead's Metaphysics

#### BACKGROUND

Whitehead's attempt is one of breaking out into a new philosophical system. The scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave him his inspiration. This revolution was anti-philosophical, a return to the contemplation of brute fact. The seventeenth century answer to the Ionian question "What is the world made of?" was, "the world is a succession of instantaneous configurations of matter, or of material."<sup>1</sup> Aristotle and his philosophy was of no help to the advance of physical science in the Middle Ages, because he classified instead of measuring like Plato and Pythagoras had done.

Whitehead develops a Speculative Philosophy, i.e. he tries "to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted."<sup>2</sup> His efforts, he claims, are built on the thought of the modern day European empirists including: Decartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Berkeley. Whitehead claimed to be a Platonist, and stated that all of European philosophy was merely a series of footnotes to Plato. True, Whitehead admired Plato's work, but whether or not he could be called a Platonist remains to be seen.

What Whitehead proposes is a Philosophy of Organism where the sole concern is the "becoming" of events. It is a system where the relatedness of every event is of primary importance. "Matter" had been the basis of nature in past philosophies; "organism" took over this position in Whitehead's philosophy. All experiences are united; they are not simply detached and passing events. And each is the outcome of a feeling of the whole of the rest of the world. An "entity" or "event" is the term Whitehead uses for the most basic unit of being. Anything real is an entity. Entities are the concrete facts. Locke was very close to an organic philosophy, but his revision of the traditional categories was not drastic enough. Hume would have gotten closer had he not balked at overthrowing Aristotle's subject-predicate relationship. Leibniz's "monads" are close to what Whitehead had in mind with "entity" but he retained the Cartesian substance which separated him from Whitehead.

Whitehead's philosophy is one of organisms evolving into more complex states. Organisms endure through a type of evolution. These entities are constantly undergoing a process and are at all times related to all other events in the world. Each entity retains its own identity throughout its endurance. Each event by reason of its own limitation has a certain value but also by reason of its very nature, it requires the interlocking relationship with the whole world in order to be itself. By mere endurance this value is retained.

Following upon his background, Whitehead uses natural

science and the world as his basis, and to this he tries to relate aesthetic, moral, and religious interests. He builds his realistic, systematic philosophy to "harmonize, refashion, and justify divergent institutions as to the nature of things."<sup>3</sup>

#### ACTUAL ENTITIES

In the philosophy of organism, the "soul" in Hume and the "mind" in Locke and Hume are expressed by the phrase "actual entity" or "actual occasion," both meaning the same thing. This is the idea referred to in the previous section by the term "entity." An actual entity is a res vera in the Cartesian sense of the term, i.e. what he referred to as "substance." This must be qualified to mean Decartes' substance in its looser sense, where he refers to body and soul as substances. Actual entities are what the world is made of. They are the final, real things. Apart from them there is nothing. They are the "subjects" of which the world is composed and are in control of their own immediacy of becoming. "God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far off empty space."<sup>4</sup>

These actual entities are self-creative, yet in part they are decided by other actual entities; this is essential to their "being" as they exist in a multiplicity of other occasions. They cannot be conceived of in abstraction from these others. This is important because a network is necessary to maintain Whitehead's system. All entities are potentially part of every other entity. It is within the nature of "being" that it be

potency for every "becoming." This relationship is expressed by Whitehead as the Principle of Relativity.

Just what an actual entity is, is up to its own becoming. It is ~~an~~ a state of process of development where the outcome is a creative synthesis, individual and passing. This creativity is assured by the principle of process. It allows for originality and spontaneity of decision in each actual occasion. Individuality is at its strongest here.

Whitehead seems at best paradoxical as he explains this individuality and its relationship to other occasions. Although an event is self-creative and individual, it is also subject to the influence of other occasions. We can assume that there is no single actual occasion, in the sense of an isolated actual occasion, but we must also believe that somehow "Each actual occasion enjoys a fleeting moment of subjective existence, its phase of subjective immediacy. During the phase, an occasion is utterly alone making of itself what it can."<sup>5</sup> The fact remains, for it is expressed all too clearly by Whitehead in numerous passages, that actual entities involve each other. This is by reason of their prehension of each other. "Prehension" will be treated in a later section.

As can be seen, Whitehead has made actual entities supreme. Beyond them there is nothing; they are in actuality somewhere, and in potency everywhere. This is the Ontological Principle. Stated simply it says that actual entities are the only reasons. Included here also is the principle of efficient and final



causation. Only actual entities are efficient and final causes.

Due to their relatedness, actual entities form a togetherness with each other, and this constitutes a "nexus," as Whitehead has termed it. A nexus occurs when a set of actual entities are related due to their immanence of one another. Actual entities involved must have a common event (an eternal object) which is derived from all members of the social group of actual entities.

If one such nexus is of extraordinary importance it may be termed a Region, Society, Living Organism, or Person.<sup>6</sup> Whitehead gives special emphasis to "Society." He calls it a nexus with social order. He also refers to every physical object which endures temporally as a Society. Endurance gives a thing importance, which it retains throughout its continuance. This means that many things Whitehead originally referred to (or at least seemed to be referring to) as actual entities, are now seen in a more expanded light as societies. The distinction is this: societies endure and are made up of a succession of nexūs (plural of nexus) each of which is the whole realized society including its history up to that stage of existence. A society is a continuous chain of antecedent nexūs. On the other hand, actual occasions have no history, never change, they only become and perish. It is in this perishing that they assume a new metaphysical function. But the mere acts of becoming and perishing along with the fact that they <sup>together form</sup> ~~are~~ an actuality which undergoes concrescence, implies a time lapse within the

existence of an actual occasion, thus, at least a brief endurance. Whitehead says that "An actual entity is the enjoyment of a certain quantum of physical time."<sup>7</sup> He also says that "it [a subject] passes from a subjective aim in concrescence into a superject with objective immortality."<sup>8</sup> This would seem to take some amount of time.

In Religion in the Making Whitehead deals with this question. Here he says every entity is in its essence social and requires the society in order to exist. The society for each entity, actual or ideal, is the all inclusive universe, including its ideal forms.<sup>9</sup> The question then is this: Does not the term society, in effect, mean the same thing as actual entity? I think the answer must be negative because a society is a chain of nexūs which endures. When Whitehead speaks of the concrescence of an actual entity, he does not think of a temporal process in the way we usually do. "Time" to him here means a "perpetual perishing."<sup>10</sup> What we normally think of as time involves a division into past, present, and future. Such a concept of time would not explain Whitehead's concept since his philosophy is one of continuous process. It must be pointed out that Whitehead is not consistent in his use of the word "time." I would have to say that in the light of the above statement from Religion in the Making Whitehead does cover the possibility of every actual entity being part of a society, because he does make the universe itself a society. I would think that there would certainly be few actual entities which were

not part of a society. The question that still remains in my mind is how can actual entities, which do not endure or change, go together to form a society which does endure? It seems that Whitehead has not expressed himself too clearly on this matter. At least I confess that I am not too clear on how he distinguishes actual entities from societies.

In summary, the role of the actual occasion in the world is this: The actual temporal world is a multiplicity of occasions of actualization. These occasions are the primary units composing the world. Each is an "epochal occasion," and the actual world is a community of these.

#### ETERNAL OBJECTS

Besides actual entities, Whitehead speaks of another type of fundamental entity which he calls the "eternal objects." All other entities only express how these two fundamental types are in community with each other in the actual world. Eternal objects are transcendent entities; they are potentiality waiting to be realized by actual entities. They apply to all actual entities (within their limitations) and can be actualized by any number of them. "Ingression" is the term used to describe the process of an eternal object being realized by an actual entity. Eternal objects are abstract, meaning they exist by themselves without reference to an occasion, i.e. before ingression. In this sense they are said to be isolated. Whitehead points out three ways in which an eternal object can be comprehended: 1) by acquaintance with its particular individuality,

2) in its general relationship with other eternal objects as apt for realization in actual occasions, or 3) by acquaintance with the general principle which expresses its ingression in particular actual occasions. Before ingression, their relationships do not involve individual essences.

Eternal objects are very different from actual occasions; they are able to be actualized indefinitely without change, as their name eternal object implies. A different eternal object is produced if any change in its individual essence takes place. Their function is bound up with actual entities. They provide ingredients for actual entities, obtaining effectiveness only in the becoming of an actual entity. This of course means that they become effective (actualized) by the decision of some entity. Actuality can be said to be a togetherness of actual occasions and eternal objects.

Eternal objects are immutable and primordial; they are of course eternal but they must depend on God for their effectiveness. God envisages all eternal objects in his primordial nature. This does not mean that they are created by God; they are not. He presupposes them, just as they presuppose him. They do, however, in a sense belong to the divine primordial self. Whitehead is forced to state the definite location of eternal objects because he states "Everything must be somewhere; and here 'somewhere' means some actual entity."<sup>11</sup> This is because of the Ontological Principle which states actual entities are the only reasons. So Whitehead uses the actual

entity God as a place of "subsistence" for eternal objects. He says they are components of the primordial nature of God. More will be said about this later.

There is also the case of complex eternal objects, where a hierarchy of abstraction can be built up by proceeding from simple to more complex eternal objects. The higher the degree of complexity, the more gained in the approach to the full concreteness of an actual occasion.

"...eternal objects, as in God's primordial nature, constitute the Platonic world of ideas."<sup>12</sup> Whitehead even goes all the way back to Pythagoras in his account of the connection between actual occasions and eternal objects. He says it is out of Pythagoras' discussion of mathematics that the idea arose. Whitehead claims to have merely amplified it. In efforts to clarify actual occasions and eternal objects Whitehead has paralleled them in the roughest possible way to Particulars and Universals, respectively, which are spoken of throughout the history of philosophy.

### Whitehead's Cosmology

#### PROCESS

In process philosophy the term "event" is used in place of the old "substance." This gives the nature of things a sense of happening. All actualities in the universe are processes of experience; thus making the universe an advancing assemblage of these processes. In the Philosophy of Organism events are in

the process of becoming, and this includes the process of "con-  
crescence,"<sup>WHICH</sup> is an actual entity's moving toward its final cause  
(its growing). Growth and creative process are fundamental.  
An occasion's concrescence is built upon past occasions. Every  
occasion must take into account its past occasions. These past  
occasions are said to supply data for present ones. The pro-  
cess of experiencing is made up of the reception of data (also  
called objects) into the unity of that complex occasion which  
is the process itself. All occasions require these antecedent  
data, which are said to be the ground of the concrescent process.  
New occasions must make active reference to entities composing  
its past. At the same time the present entity bears in its  
essence the relationship it will have for the future; so the  
future is also immanent in the present.

#### PREHENSION

This relationship of present to past occasions begins with  
the idea of "prehension." Prehension is at the root of White-  
head's cosmology. This doctrine along with "objectification"  
he derived from Locke. All prehensions consist of three fac-  
tors: 1) the subject--the actual entity prehending; 2) the  
datum--which is prehended; and 3) the subjective form--which  
is how the subject prehends the datum. There are two kinds of  
prehension--physical and conceptual, the former being the pre-  
hension of actual entities, the latter of eternal objects.  
These make up the two poles of every occasion--the mental and  
the physical. There are also two species of prehensions: pos-

itive and negative. Positive refers to the normal objectification of datum into the subject, while negative is the elimination of the datum. Whitehead refers to prehension as the "feeling" of one thing by another. Some species of the subjective form (comparable to a medium) are: emotions, valuations, purposes, adversions (valuation upward), aversion (valuation downward), consciousness.

Prehension acts as an important bond in Whitehead's system. It is sort of a "uniting force." Joad calls it a grasping or taking hold of one thing by another.<sup>13</sup> Emmet says it is "the grasping by one actual entity of some aspect or part of other actual entities, and appropriating them in the formation of its own nature."<sup>14</sup> It is a binding force that every entity has with every other entity; this can be through either positive or negative prehension.

Physical prehension, being the more concrete, describes how an occasion in its immediacy of being absorbs another occasion which has perished. Only perishing actual entities are data. By perishing they are said to have passed into "objective immortality," i.e. they do not cease to be useful, but continue in a different metaphysical state. Conceptual prehensions are derived from physical prehensions. There is still a third type of feeling--"hybrid" feeling. Every subject is first effected by hybrid physical feelings, in which God's conceptual feelings are the data. This is how entities prehend God. The other function of hybrid feelings is that they

feel the conceptual feelings of other actual entities. So in completion, conceptual feelingsprehend eternal objects. This conceptual prehension is the actualization of ideal possibilities. So conceptual feelings must wait until at least some physical and hybrid feelings have taken place before becoming operative.. Conceptual and physical prehensions work together in forming an actual occasion; in doing this a fusion of the ideal (referred to as appearance by Whitehead) and the actual (referred to as reality) takes place. With this type of development in mind, Whitehead speaks of the progressive concrescence of prehensions as forming the unity of a subject.<sup>15</sup>

#### FREEDOM

With the influence of the past lying so heavily on the present becoming of an occasion, which in turn bears on the future, something must be said of freedom. Whitehead speaks of the category of Freedom and Determination:

The concrescence of each individual actual entity is internally determined and externally free...in each concrescence whatever is determinable is determined, but... there is always a remainder for the decision of the subject-superject of that concrescence....This final decision is the reaction of the unity of the whole to its own internal determination. This reaction is the final modification of emotion, appreciation, and purpose<sup>16</sup>

The problem arises from Whitehead's efforts to maintain freedom, which he must do, so that the world can experience novelty in its self-creative advance, while at the same time, maintaining an interconnected process moving through time. He lays



down two principles for actual occasions to follow when undergoing creativity: 1) the novel consequent must preserve some identity with the original event (the ground), and 2) the novel consequent must preserve some contrast with the original event.<sup>17</sup> The first of these is to retain definiteness, while the second obtains vividness and quality. Freedom and individuality lie in self-creation whose immediate activity is separate and private. At the same time through the immanence of the past and the immanence of the future, the occasions are connected. Each moment of experience has to be a transition between two worlds, the immediate past and the immediate future.

Occasions arise as effects in light of their past, and end as causes in light of their future. Since this causality is independent (self-creative) it forms the ground for freedom in the universe, while strict determination is an exaggeration of the interrelatedness of actual entities in the world.

This is a typical development in Whitehead. He often brings two contrasting matters together by saying they both apply but in a different sense; or that they both can function, but from different points of view or opposite ends. We are not accustomed to this type of resolution and sometimes Whitehead takes advantage of this by stretching his "paradoxes" too far.

To summarize some of Whitehead's thoughts on becoming and process, we look to Process and Reality where he says:

...experience involves a becoming, that

becoming means that something becomes, and that what becomes involves repetition transformed into novel immediacy. (*italics his*)<sup>18</sup>

All entities are active and are broken down into modes of functioning which together make up their process of becoming. The future is the combining of eternal objects with actual entities which then become being, but always within the limitations of the actuality. As I understand it, this is why for example, the actuality man cannot realize the eternal object flying.

#### SATISFACTION---PERISHING

All actual entities are in constant concrescence through prehension. The final phase in this process of concrescence is a complex, fully determinate feeling, and this is called the "satisfaction" of an actual occasion. Concrescence is the building up of this satisfaction. This then is the termination of an actual entity's becoming. Order is an actual entity reaching satisfaction. Disorder exists because this order is only partially reached, i.e. all actual entities do not attain satisfaction. When an actual occasion does reach satisfaction, it perishes. The doctrine of becoming is now balanced with the doctrine of perishing. That is to say, perishing initiates becoming. Upon perishing an actual entity passes into non-being where it becomes datum for another occasion. This is how the past lives in the present. Upon perishing entities do not become nothing, but remain a stubborn fact. They perish only to assume a new place in the process of generation. How

the past perishes is how the future becomes. This state of being of an occasion Whitehead has termed its "objective immortality."

What is divested of its own living immediacy becomes a real component in other living immediacies of becoming. This is the doctrine that the creative advance of the world is the becoming, the perishing, and the objective immortalities of those things which jointly constitute stubborn fact.<sup>19</sup>

A brief sketch of Whitehead's cosmology might sound like this: Actual occasions become and then perish; as they perish they obligate other occasions to take account of them. Then there are the unchanging possibilities for realization, the eternal objects, which take part in the actual occasion's novel concrescence. Finally, there is the underlying metaphysical principle of the universe, the ultimate activity which Whitehead now calls "creativity."

#### Whitehead's Epistemology

What Whitehead says about epistemology seems very difficult to understand. Victor Lowe, who is probably one of the best commentators on Whitehead, says that with certain topics, like the theory of human knowledge, Whitehead went too far, and as a result did not adequately elucidate them. It is with this in mind that I will try to give some thoughts on Whitehead's Epistemology.

#### THE FALLACY OF MISPLACED-CONCRETENESS

First I have to point out some traditions Whitehead did

not accept. He abandoned the idea of simple location as being the primary way matter (entity to him) is involved with space and time. This had been taken to be the fundamental fact of concrete nature in earlier philosophies. Whitehead's system requires that in a sense everything is everywhere at all times. Every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. To hold that this occupation of space is a real fact without reference to anything else and that things are simply located would have been inconsistent. Whitehead calls this error "The Fallacy of Misplaced-Concreteness." He complains that things which have actually been abstracted from reality for special purposes of thought have sometimes been taken as real. The fallacy involves neglecting this degree of abstraction involved when considering a certain point. Whitehead claims that this fallacy has added much confusion to the seventeenth century scientific scheme. In his philosophy, Whitehead makes actual entities incapable of abstraction from each other, thus helping to avoid this problem.

Whitehead draws on the idea of substance and quality as an example of this fallacy. This, like simple location, is the usual context in which we think of things; they are the most natural ideas for the human mind. Whitehead admits that they are useful for getting our ideas straight. What he objects to is that we do not think concretely because of this fallacy, but rather with simplified matters of fact. We eventually will see these to be logical constructions of abstractions instead

of concrete matters of fact. Whitehead claims that all dualism is a result of this mistaking an abstraction for a concrete fact. However, many times Whitehead makes use of dualism himself as he attributes two qualities to one entity.

#### KNOWLEDGE

Whitehead is in basic agreement with the subject-object relation as being the fundamental structural pattern of experience. What he doesn't agree with is the subject-object as identified with knower-known.

"Knowledge is the conscious discrimination of objects experienced."<sup>20</sup> Whitehead's epistemology is not the ordinary type based on principles and demonstration, but rather on direct observation and common sense. Sense perception is significant, but it is only the superficial part of our experience. Causal experience is the more fundamental. These two modes of perception he calls "presentational immediacy" and "causal efficacy" respectively. Presentational immediacy is a clear, definite level of perception, whereas causal efficacy is more vague.

"Symbolic reference" is an attempt by Whitehead to bring these two modes of perception together. What he does is establish common ground for both types. He finds "presented locus" and "the identity of an eternal object" to be identical components in each. In this way he joins the two types of perception which go together to make up knowledge.

It is a very subjective and interpretive method by which he claims to have solved the problem. Victor Lowe has accused Whitehead of handling the conceptual element in perceptual knowledge on the metaphysical plane instead of the epistemological. I would say that with Whitehead's theory of knowledge being one of objects experienced through perception, he had to handle it on the metaphysical plane. The real question, it seems, is whether this is an epistemology at all. Does mere casual experience and sense perception make a theory of knowledge? I think not, Whitehead has completely avoided principles, concepts, the intellect, memory, and other epistemological "entities."

## II. GOD IN WHITEHEAD'S METAPHYSICS

### Background

Throughout the history of philosophy there has always been one element which has consistently found its way into many systems. This one element is some sort of supreme being, an ultimate controller of all (or a god of one variety or another). The ancient Greeks are famous for their many gods, and this need, as it were, has stayed with man ever since. Plato left us with what he called the Demiurge or Craftsman. This was the Good Craftsman of the "Timaeus" which fashioned and ordered all material things to a good end. This is Soul at its best and most perfected state. It is interesting to note that Plato speaks of matter as eternal, creating<sup>A</sup> dualism

Aristotle advanced the idea of God to an eternal, immaterial substance with no possibility of change or motion, and he called this the Unmoved Mover. Epicurus then followed and denied the gods any relationship or influence on the world at all. He did, however, maintain that there were gods, because of our "images" of them.

Then the early Christian theologians developed their doctrine in which the immanence of God was manifest through the person of Christ. Whitehead saw three phases in the history

of Christianity: 1) Plato's idea that God should be conceived of as a persuasive agency (this he calls one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion); 2) the supreme moment in Christian history--Christ's life; and 3) the fact that the early Christian theologians saw what metaphysics required in making the plurality of the individuals consistent with the unity of the Universe. They saw that the World required a union with God and God required a union with the World. But this third point has been grossly underestimated. The early Christian theologians made the metaphysical discovery of divine immanence, but there they stopped. They should have gone on to conceive of the world <sup>IN TERMS OF</sup> metaphysical categories through which God is interpreted. They also should have gone on, Whitehead says, to conceive of God in these metaphysical categories. They did see God as necessary to the World, but not the World necessary to God.

Because they did not follow this through, the Classical Theological school arose based on the Augustinian notion of God being wholly transcendent. Whitehead challenges theology today

to show how the World is founded on something beyond mere transient fact and how it issues something beyond the perishing of occasions.... We ask Theology to express that element in perishing lives which is undying by reason of its expression of perfections proper to our own finite natures.<sup>22</sup> AJ

But Whitehead does not wait for theologians to develop this. He comes very close to answering his own question in Adventures



of Ideas where he speaks of the possibility of man having a "soul" which "may be free from its complete dependence upon the bodily organization."<sup>23</sup> This leaves room for immortality of the soul and an immanent connection with the divine.

When Whitehead constructed his God, he tried to do so in the light of those early Christian theologians i.e. within the metaphysical categories he had set up. His God must be one sharing his nature with the world. He must be susceptible to change and not totally beyond the creatures of the world.

What Whitehead did in the early part of the twentieth century was to set the tempo for much discussion on God and the whole idea of process among present day theologians. These theologians today are saying exactly the same thing:

the traditional notion of God...is a self-contradictory idea which forms no necessary part either of an adequate metaphysics or a sound Christian Theology.<sup>24</sup>

Process theologians are very much in agreement with what Whitehead said. They hold that concrete reality is a creative process, and they see the new personalism as a reaction to the static view of God.

I will return to this later, but now we need to see how Whitehead's God fits and does not fit into his metaphysics.

### God

#### WHITEHEAD'S NEED OF GOD

Aristotle had a God because special causes were required to sustain motion. Whitehead's problem is similar; his system

requires a God to organize and make available the vast realm of possibilities. In this function God is known as the Principle of Concretion. Nothing new could become if the past provided everything for the present. There must be novelty and adventure. This is where God fits in. The fact that order exists in creativity indicates a source of order. God provides possibilities (Principle of Concretion) but he must also limit possibilities to maintain order; here God is the Principle of Limitation.

All of Whitehead's categories require God as their chief and indispensable exemplification. Whitehead attaches this role to God. He says: "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."<sup>25</sup> In Whitehead's organic system, this principle of life, order, and growth must be immanent; Whitehead cannot understand the world apart from God, nor God apart from the world.

In the end, however, Whitehead admits, as do many others, that "the fact of God's existence turns out to be the ultimate irrationality when our quest for understanding is pushed to its limits."<sup>26</sup>

#### GOD, THE ACTUAL ENTITY

God is assigned the position of an actual entity in Whitehead's scheme. "God is an actual entity..."<sup>27</sup> He also says that God is non-temporal.<sup>28</sup> Here Whitehead means that there is no becoming or perishing to God, and that he exists always.

Right away there seems to be an inconsistency. Whitehead makes God an exceptional actual entity in that he endures always. Yet he has said that God is not an exception to the metaphysical principles, rather their exemplification. An actual entity originates in hybrid physical feelings through which it prehends God's conceptual feeling. God, however, originates from the mental pole i.e. conceptual experience.<sup>29</sup> Here again we see that God is not an actual entity, or at least not an ordinary one. In actual entities the physical feelings are prior to conceptual ones. God is not like this; he originates from the mental pole and actually provides for the first physical feelings of other actual entities. What I would then propose is that God is not an actual entity. A better, but still lagging status would be that of a society. But even at that, he would be a special, more powerful society than any other. For he has to be taken account of in every creative phase. He is the Principle of Concretion, the Principle of Limitation, the one whom the world could not exist without. His importance is just too great for him to be referred to merely as an actual entity. He is something more than that, for Whitehead attributes to God characteristics which break the bounds of his previously arranged metaphysical categories.

Whitehead, however, could do nothing else in light of his philosophy. Because of his Ontological Principle he had to make God an actual entity, otherwise God would be ineffective, and have no influence; he would in fact be nothing. In

a vain attempt to keep God within his system (as an actual entity) while at the same time attributing to him all the characteristics he felt he must, Whitehead divided his God into two natures. This follows closely on the Christian doctrine of the human and divine natures of God, which did, I am sure, influence Whitehead.

#### PRIMORDIAL NATURE

First, there is the primordial nature of God. When Whitehead referred to God, he was usually speaking of this nature. This is, if I may use the term, the "supreme" side of God; here is where God's transcendence lies. Whitehead says that this nature "is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality."<sup>30</sup> As the term suggests, this is his first action on the world. This is where eternal objects "subsist" and where they are made available to actual entities. Out of the primordial nature the principles of concretion and limitation operate, initiating a definite outcome from an otherwise ambiguous situation. He provides the ground for these eternal objects--Principle of Concretion; and he limits the infinite possibilities for an actual entity so that they can become actual--Principle of Limitation.

When things are limited there is necessarily implied a valuation. So God attaches a value to each new occasion as it becomes. Conceptually, God includes all the possibilities of value. When an actual entity prehends its initial hybrid physical feeling from God it receives its initial start.

This start is called its "initial aim" and will be discussed at greater length later. But this start gives the actual entity a direction in which to develop and something on which to build its value. All of this limitation imposed by God Whitehead attributes to his (God's ) goodness. All of the limitation helps to bring order and harmony to the world. Whitehead admits that he has no logical reasons why God does this other than out of goodness, he says:

God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality. For no reason can be given for just that limitation which it stands in His nature to impose.... No reason can be given for the nature of God because that nature is the ground of rationality.<sup>31</sup>

Since all the eternal objects are envisaged in the primordial nature of God, all novelty must be a choice between these forms of definiteness. But creativity is broader; it can advance through permutations and combinations of this infinite variety of forms. Whitehead says that this primordial nature is infinite. He also says it is devoid of negative prehensions. It is also complete and eternal. This nature is certainly not concrete, for his feelings are only conceptual. Conceptual feelings alone are not actual, and God does not derive his conceptual feelings from other actual occasions.

So we must ask, how can all of this be if God is an actual entity? His whole primordial nature is potency, an abstraction from reality. Here Whitehead falls into one of his criticisms of other philosophies, i.e. abstraction leads to

the Fallacy of Misplaced-Concreteness. It seems he has fallen victim to his own warnings. Whitehead even seems to make an exception to one of his most prized Categories of Explanation. It is the Principle of Relativity, where every item in the world is involved and connected to every other item; Whitehead says that it is by this principle that God is the "one non-derivative actuality, unbound by its prehensions to an actual world."<sup>32</sup>

It is certainly very hard to see God as an actual entity within his primordial nature. Whitehead evidently realized this, because he did attempt to save himself by introducing a second nature of God. Here, in what he calls God's "consequent nature," he can be more easily seen as an actual entity. However, it is the two natures together which make up God and they must both be considered before making a judgement.

#### CONSEQUENT NATURE

The consequent nature of God is "The reaction of the temporal world on the nature of God..."<sup>33</sup> This nature stems from the Principle of Relativity. In his consequent nature God physically prehends other actual entities. This nature is not complete like the primordial. It develops as time goes on, but it is non-temporal in the sense that it is everlasting and does not perish. It is the prehension by God of others where God receives into himself what occurs in the world. Presumably, this nature would not become operative until there were data (perishing actual occasions) for God toprehend. He does not,

however,prehend all actual occasions positively. In this sense his consequent nature is a judgement. It is important to note that just as God prehends actual occasions, so do actual occasions prehend God. He too, is a source of data for actual occasions.

When God prehends datum it is transmuted into a living, ever-present fact in his consequent nature. God does not create the world, but he "saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life."<sup>34</sup> So actual occasions complete God's consequent nature as it moves through time. What this nature is depends on other actual occasions and what they are. There is definitely change and concrescence in this nature, and it depends on the creativity of the Universe. This side of God's nature is derived from the physical experience of the temporal world which then integrates with the primordial nature.

#### SUPERJECT NATURE

Whitehead does make brief mention of one more nature of God. This is his "superject nature." It is tied up with the fact that what he prehends of the world with his consequent nature can be made available again to newly arising actual occasions. In other words, he does not have to perish in order to become datum. God can be a subject and a superject both at the same time.

By combining the three natures into one we see that Whitehead's God is capable of both physical and conceptual prehen-

sions like all actual entities. He also manifests creativity (at least in his consequent nature). He can derive and contribute data like other actual entities (even though he need not perish to contribute). He performs all the functions of actual entities within his nature. However, it is his consequent nature that allows him to do this. It seems to me that Whitehead developed these two natures of God in order to avoid contradiction. His first conception of God was a supreme organizer to keep order and provide for novelty. He felt, being influenced by tradition, that this God was above man and the universe. But he had a system to maintain, and so was faced with the problem of fitting God into it. This he did through the consequent nature, for he had to be with man in the affairs of his life. He had to take a place within the system.

Let us go on and see how these two natures apply to the actual creativity and process which the universe is undergoing.

### Creativity

All philosophies have an ultimate which becomes actual in respect to its accidents. Most systems have God as their ultimate or their "Absolute." Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism has "creativity" as its ultimate with God as its primordial non-temporal accident. Creativity is the potential becoming actual, and this makes up an occasion of experience. But this ultimate, creativity, could do nothing without its prime accident, God. He is the complete ideal harmony through which cre-



activity achieves actuality. Nothing could become without first being realized conceptually by God; then it is transmitted into the physical world. God and creativity are mutually dependent and have existed together always.

#### INITIAL AIM

Creativity is not an actual entity, it is just a metaphysical principle common to all things, God included. It is pure, formless activity. It is not the reason nor does it give reasons for the existence of things. It is God who provides all occasions with their initial aim. This is received through their hybrid feeling of God as mentioned earlier. In this respect God serves as an efficient and final cause. But he is only one causal factor among many. Other actual entities are efficient causes too, and there is an urge toward self-development in every occasion. This serves as a final cause.

This initial aim is one of God's most powerful functions. The source of it is God's causal efficacy. It is the initiating move which starts an occasion on its way to satisfaction. It is always the best aim in a given situation. This is merely the originating element directing an occasion to a goal. The rest is up to the individual entity. God is limited by the freedom of the occasion to modify its initial aim. God does not have foreknowledge of what we will do. His power lies in the worship he inspires. He tries to attain value in the world through persuasion. He makes available different "lures" (eternal objects). He does not impose his will; rather he

makes use of an overpowering rationality through these different possibilities. Here his goodness places restrictions on sovereign power. Plato is the first to talk of the victory of persuasion over force.

#### ORDER

God of course has an aim too. It is one of bringing value to the world. He does this by establishing an order in the world. This is an aesthetic order, not a conceptual or cognitive order. Whitehead sums this up by saying God's aim is at strength of beauty. To this he devotes the entire last section of Adventures of Ideas. He says that "the teleology of the Universe is directed toward Beauty."<sup>35</sup> He says that the essential qualities are Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art, and Peace. So God expects the outcome of the world to be an aesthetic order.

#### SUBJECTIVE AIM

Beyond the initial aim of an occasion provided by God there is what is called the "subjective aim." This is the occasion itself controlling its own destiny. It is the taking over from the inevitable ordering of things (initial aim) to a branching out into self-determination. This aim determines just what an occasion is. The subjective aim deals with conceptual feelings concerning its immediate present and relevant future.

#### EVIL

As a result of subjective aim and self-determination evil

arises. God brings good out of evil, but evil is not to be considered as a means to good. Evil is the failure of an occasion to acquire some level of beauty, which is God's intent. Freedom exists; therefore one can reject God's aim. Evil is a risk God takes in providing an initial aim and allowing creativity. Since God prehends actual occasions he must prehend evil. God suffers the evil in actual occasions. This shows that complete determinism does not exist; if it did there would be no evil since it is not part of God's aim. God is a part of all occasions and thus feels the evil of occasions. He overcomes this with good.

Evil is brute force and it is unstable. Through this instability a moral order can take hold. Evil promotes its own elimination through destruction. It is positive and destructive where good is positive and creative. The mere fact of self-creation implies some loss and decay including frustration and tragedy. Since evil works for its own destruction, creative good wins out within the process.

God is sometimes called the "creator" in Whitehead's philosophy. This stems from his providing the initial aim. He only conditions originality, he does not determine it. God is just as subject to creativity as any actual occasion. "He is not before all creation, but with all creation." (italics his)<sup>36</sup> Creativity remains the principle of novelty, the universal of universals, and the ultimate by which an occasion becomes.

## God and the World

### INTERLOCKING RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between God and the World is seen to be integral and one of interdependence. They are both within creative advance; but neither can enjoy this creativity without the other. Yet these two are in constant contrast with each other. For God, permanence is primordial and flux is derived from the World. For the World, flux is foremost and permanence comes from God. God is one and absorbs the World's multiplicity into his unity. The World performs the opposite function. God is many in that he acquires the multiplicity of data in the World (in his consequent nature). So also, the World is one because of universal immanence. They each contain a mental and physical pole. In God the mental is prior; in the World the physical is prior. Whitehead's final summary of the contrasting and seemingly contradictory relationship between God and the World

can only be expressed in terms of a group of antitheses, whose apparent self-contradiction depend on neglect of the diverse categories of existence. In each antithesis there is a shift of meaning which converts the opposition into a contrast.

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with World, God is actual eminently, as that, in compaision with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.<sup>37</sup>

#### PANTHEISM

With all the emphasis placed on the importance of the world it is only natural that Whitehead be accused of pantheism. John Cobb makes an important distinction in the qualitative difference between God and the World in his book A Christian Natural Theology. He says God's influence in providing an initial aim for an occasion is of tremendously greater importance than the influence of any other occasion. Pantheism says that the universe as a whole is God. But Whitehead's occasions actually exist apart from each other; they are merely united by prehension. Even at this, contemporaries do notprehend one another. I do not believe one can say that the universe (actual entities) is God in Whitehead's system. Panentheism would be a doctrine more rightfully associated with Whitehead. This means that God includes the world as a part though not the whole of his being. I say this with the distinction of God's two natures in mind. His consequent nature would be that part including the world, while his primordial nature would remain free and transcendent.

## Religion

Whitehead's God is not merely a "metaphysical accident." There is a religious feeling attached to him. This religious feeling is characterized by a feeling of refreshment and companionship. Such feelings of enrichment indicate the presence of the divine. Especially in his two books Religion in the Making and Adventures of Ideas Whitehead speaks of the religious availability of God. But one must keep in mind that this aspect of God is not essential for his function in the universe. Whitehead accuses past theologians of paying God "metaphysical compliments" to establish his religious significance. Whitehead seems to take God out of his system when he speaks of this religious significance. For instance, he hardly mentions it in Process and Reality where his metaphysics is explained. Rather, he uses the two other books mentioned. Religious experience was to him an important aspect of human experience, but it by itself was not enough to justify a God.

The religious God stands out as the persuasion to the final aim of beauty. His concern is the pursuit of the aesthetic order mentioned before. Whitehead speaks of God as "the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."<sup>38</sup> He even calls God a spiritual being in Religion in the Making. Religion was something real to Whitehead which could change character. Individu-

al worth arose from religion. Religion is concerned with reactions to purpose and emotion. Its dogma can not be just pleasing ideas but they must seek penetration and clarity. Perhaps Whitehead's best summary of religion is that it "is what the individual does with his own solitariness."<sup>39</sup> Without religion, life is pain and misery lighted up by occasional enjoyments.

Although religion is very real to him, Whitehead does not uphold any one religion. He makes many modifications on the traditional Christian concept of God which exempts him from this religion. Certainly a changeable, growing, imperfect God was a drastically new idea. But since that time, this is exactly what theologians have been discussing. The possibility that God does not know our future actions and that we must influence him if he is to be with us--these are questions being dealt with today. This does not say that God is different now, rather it advocates the idea that our understanding of him is changing, growing, becoming clearer. But this is subject matter for theologians and not within the scope of this paper.

Whitehead has tried to fit God into his system as best he can, for he does not want God to be "stuck on" to his system to answer unrationalized religious emotions. He tries to bend and twist as much as he can to make the God of his metaphysical system religiously available. His attempts seem to <sup>be</sup> fairly successful in light of God's final aim i.e. persuading us to a "strength of beauty."

## CONCLUSION

Whitehead has been successful; he did break out into a new philosophical system. His scheme is quite comprehensive, covering many areas, including a variety of philosophical points. Whitehead's attempt has been at making his philosophy as all-encompassing and as near perfect as possible. But he does not claim to have settled everything, by any means. Due to weaknesses of insight and deficiencies in language, "Philosophers can never hope finally to formulate these metaphysical first principles."<sup>40</sup>

But Whitehead has made a very significant contribution to philosophy and also to theology. He has been a contributor to modern process thought in both fields. He had history to use as a basis for his concept of God, but obviously he did not let this confine him in any way. He gave his own ideas of God, many of which were self-imposed because of his metaphysical set up. Actually, in proportion, Whitehead spoke very little of God. His major work consists of 533 pages, and only the last 15 are directed toward God. In other works God is rarely mentioned, with the exception of Religion in the Making and Adventures of Ideas where a chapter or two is reserved for God. When he does speak of God he gives him special attributes or powers. He does make him an exception to his categories. He calls him an "accident" which he then must qualify to be a primordial, non-temporal accident. With those qualifications he is hardly



an accident anymore.

What he does say about God is unclear and inconsistent in many cases. Whitehead was aware of this. He knew he was having problems with the entity "God" and no matter how he approached it, there was still something which was not quite right. He says in his essay on "Immortality" (one of the last things he wrote) that his discussion of God was not based on absolute certainty, and that, at best, human concepts give only a glimpse of the nature of God.<sup>41</sup> I think he was right on this point, and this idea leads all philosophies to the same difficulty. God is the supreme actual entity, meaning above other actual entities. Whitehead himself had to submit to this by creating the primordial nature of God. He did what he could in relating God to his system; he even brought in the religious availability of God by which he persuades everything to a strength of beauty in trying to show God's immanence. But it is very hard to bring God down to man's level in a philosophical system.

Whitehead's contribution to philosophy has been an inspiration to many as well as a springboard into process thought. Whitehead leaves us, as must all process philosophers, on a challenging note. He says the future is ours to determine. It will be what all actual entities make it, God included. It will consist of the past and present data and the ideal possibilities which are before us. The direction creativity takes and whether or not the final aim will be reached, depends upon

the present actual entities, what kind of data they leave behind, and how this data is used by those that are to come.

## FOOTNOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. PR p. 20.

### CHAPTER I

1. SMW p. 50.
2. PR p. 4.
3. SMW p. vii-viii
4. PR p. 27.
5. Evolution and the Christian Doctrine of Creation, p. 174.  
This is how Mr. Overman deals with this question, but it still seems unsatisfactory. Even if for a "fleeting moment" an actual occasion were "utterly alone" it would not be part of the system.
6. In AI (p. 189) Whitehead calls the human body "a set of occasions miraculously coordinated so as to pour its inheritance into various regions within the brain."
7. PR p. 434.
8. PR p. 374.
9. RM p. 104.
10. PR p. 517.
11. PR p. 73.
12. PR p. 73.
13. C.E.M. Joad, Guide to Philosophy, p. 579.
14. Dorothy Emmet, Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism, p. 87.
15. See PR p. 35.
16. PR p. 41.
17. See RM p. 111.

18. PR p. 207.
19. PR p. ix.
20. AI p. 177.
21. It is the prehension of presentational immediacy that is called feeling. This feeling is what is called concept or thought in other systems.

## CHAPTER II

22. AI p. 172.
23. AI p. 208.
24. Daniel Williams, What Present Day Theologians Are Saying, p. 73.
25. PR p. 521.
26. SMW p. 179.
27. PR p. 28.
28. See PR p. 11, RM p. 91.
29. Whitehead does speak to this in PR (p. 134) where he admits to the exception of the derivate character of conceptual feelings.
30. PR p. 521. -
31. SMW p. 178.
32. PR p. 48.
33. PR p. 19. -
34. PR p. 525.
35. AI p. 284.
36. PR p. 521.
37. PR p. 528.
38. PR p. 526.
39. RM p. 16.

CONCLUSION

40. FR p. 6.

41. "Immortality" in The Philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, ed.  
P.A. Schilpp, p. 698.

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