

## Summary of Whitehead's Process Philosophy

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### The death of nature and God

Whitehead was a realist because he wanted to understand the actual world in its brute nature (*Natura naturans*, that is nature in the active sense) not the dead one produced by an analytical science immersed in an abstract world. The root cause of "nature's death" was the analytical bifurcation of the world into mind and matter (souls and bodies, objects and subjects, truths and fallacies, God and the world etc). Whitehead emphasizes his position by quoting a line "we murder to dissect" from Wordsworth's Poem 'The Tables Turned'. He healed this divide by creating a new fundamental entity that unified both mind and matter called "actual occasions". He used the analogy of a magnet to describe how a mental and a physical pole could not exist without the other.

### Making Reality

These occasions are made real by an interaction with other actual occasion, so the process is one of "mutual-realization" This interaction is the 'prehension' of each other (as distinct from comprehension). Such transient events occur randomly in the extensive continuum forming the featureless background to the universe (cf. virtual particles in vacuum). A socially ordered cluster of such events forms an enduring nexus achieving stability by forming a self-regenerative core of events. However, to be part of reality it must be prehended by the external world (e.g. the dynamically stable nucleus of a proton is enveloped with electrons that prehend the presence of other electrons and photons). Finally, there is the living nexus which is highly unstable but can prehend and enjoy many lived experiences. To retain itself, it must take part in a never-ending series of actions based on its prehensions focused on retaining stability while enjoying the flux of experience. This requires it to actively select those actions that achieve this aim and reject those that fail. Thus, it is desire for life that makes a living nexus take part in the Darwinian struggle for the survival and the vast range of living organisms that populate the natural world are the result of attempts to satisfy a never-ending experiential desire.

"I now state the thesis that the explanation of this active attack on the environment is a three-fold urge: (i) to live, (ii) to live well, (iii) to live better. In fact, the art of life is first to be alive, secondly to be alive in a satisfactory way, and thirdly to acquire an increase in satisfaction."

### Eternal objects

Whitehead's realism requires him to adopt the ontological principle that "everything must be somewhere". This requires an explanation of the source of order (mathematical forms) and the qualities of experience (colour, taste etc). Whitehead, like most mathematicians believes that mathematical objects are real to be discovered and not invented (mathematical Platonism). Similarly, the qualities associated with the physical objects we encounter in life (cold, red, sweet, hard, soft etc.) are real objects and not invented by our minds. If this were not so, our world would be one of chaos as the nature of the objects we encounter continually change their properties. These real but unchanging non-physical objects are called eternal objects. Therefore, to realize the

world, the transient actual occasions need to be integrated with these eternal objects in the process of concrescence. This process creates the concrete world in which our appetites for food, adventure and reproduction etc. can be fulfilled. These concrete objects when endowed with stable characteristics are studied by the special sciences. But the stability is only apparent because it is the result of a dynamic and evolving creative process from a determined concrete past into an undetermined potential future.

### **Aesthetic Order**

The desire for increased quality of life is an aesthetic one. It is this desire that causes the individualization and evolution of the chaotic plenum of actual entities producing the diverse form of creatures that we find in the world. To achieve increased aesthetic satisfaction, life must discriminate between good and bad experiences, and this requires aesthetic experiences to be ordered, with good experiences being a creature's aim. This requires an ordering of eternal objects in terms of their desirability. The most desirable being an appropriate "paradise" suitable for each of the creatures. For us we call the ultimate as heaven, or paradise or God which is transcendent of the actual world. However, by the process of concrescence God becomes actual in the world itself and is therefore immanent in all stages of creation.

"All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order. The actual world is the outcome of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God."

### **Morality**

Depending on which of the special sciences you follow, the creative process can be analysed by following the physical pole and the emergence of material objects or by concentrating on the mental pole, follow the emergence of psychic entities (feelings, emotions and thoughts). Both have practical uses but by separating them from each other, they provide only a partial picture of reality. When viewed from a theological perspective, these rational sciences reveal only a primordial amoral nature of God with no care for the creatures it leaves in its track. The concept of God as the source of moral order can be understood when viewed from the consequences of this creative process. This is directly presented to its creatures in the beauty of the actual world and in their intuitive moral behaviour. For humans, it is represented through the arts and sciences viewed from a purely aesthetic perspective and through myths and stories aimed at raising the religious emotions of awe and love and moral intuitions of right and wrong. Rational judgements that override these moral intuitions are then the source of evil. Therefore, Whiteheads' speculative process philosophy argues for a creative process requiring that God is immanent as both the emotional desire for intense lived experiences (subjective aim) and in the order and beauty of the real world.

### **Realism**

Whiteheads ontological principle that everything must be somewhere demands a realistic philosophy and includes and unifies the tangible and intangible, God and the world. He achieves this by the simple act of uniting both the mental and physical as inseparable poles of actual occasions and the desire for aesthetic satisfaction. In this way his realism produces a metaphysics that brings the disciplines of science, art and theology into a harmonious relationship.

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