

The Concepts of 'Subjectivity' and 'God' as Related to Religious Experience in Alfred North Whitehead's Process Metaphysics

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Abstract

In this paper I will present some important ideas about the relation between religious experience and metaphysics in Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy. This endeavor is significant for the topic from two points of view: firstly, Whitehead's thinking is among the most comprehensive and widely extended from the 20th Century, the applications of his 'speculative scheme' covering issues from ecology, physics and the foundations of mathematics, to art and religion; secondly, the concept of 'God', with a meaning ascribed to it by Whitehead in relation both with the history of philosophy and with his own ideas, plays a key-role in *Process and Reality*, his most important treatise. For Whitehead, religion is linked, broadly speaking, to the most intimate inner evolution of a human person. Although this assertion may seem trivial, in the context of his thinking, which defines terms such as 'process', 'value' or 'satisfaction' as essentially bounded with the evolution of any actual being, to associate a kind of experience, the religious one, to the fact itself of inner becoming conveys to this experience a fundamentally profound and inalienable metaphysical character. It is this character and 'definiteness' which I will describe and analyze.

Keywords: Experience, actual entity, subjectivity, process, God, value, creativity, vision of ideals, everlastingness, life.

The general character of philosophy and the relevance of religion

Philosophy and cosmology

FOR WHITEHEAD, THE FUNDAMENTAL SOURCE out of which one can derive a philosophy is experience itself, conceived in its most elaborate, substantial and varied meaning. To live presupposes to have experiences that are brought together into a unitary self toward its own attainment. Experiences are of many kinds: good or destructive, intense or dull, essential or superficial. Yet, there are some fundamental kinds of experiences that are shaping humankind from its beginnings and which cannot be avoided to be taken into account in a philosophy imagined as a 'producer' of ultimate schemes of thought. In *Science and the Modern World* (1925) — the most important book regarding Whitehead's philosophical development which precedes *Process and Reality* (1929) — we are reading on the first page of the *Preface* the following statements: "The various human interests which suggest cosmologies, and also are influenced by them, are science, aesthetics, ethics, religion. In every age each of these topics suggests a view of the world."¹ Fundamental experiences can provide different standpoints for different cosmologies and philosophy is "in one of its functions, the critic of cosmologies."² From this assertion we can derive the observation that, from a philosophical perspective, a mythical imagery of the world has equal status as an intuition about existence with a scientific cosmology because they are pointing to different areas of actuality. Science can teach us about empirical facts and laws, while mythical archetypes can teach us about the functioning of the mind, both being entities of this universe. Philosophy must harmonize our fundamental intuitions and discoveries about reality, but it must also submit them to the test of rationality. It can manage to accomplish this testing because our intuitions never remain only to the stage of emotional retention of impressions. The cosmologies which can be shaped from different experiential standpoints are expressed in general ideas, concepts and schemes that are ultimate interpretations of events.

In Whitehead's terms, humans have 'conceptual feelings'³ concerning their mode of being. Their sensitivity is not only physical, but also conceptual, which means that they are conveying symbolism or sense to everything they encounter. Hence, while being open to take into consideration any relevant 'feeling', it also keeps a critical distance toward their conceptual formulations. Cosmologies are abstractions which synthesize the various

¹ Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures, 1925* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), vii.

² Ibid.

³ In this metaphysical context the term 'feeling' has a generalized meaning, encompassing both physical and cognitive functions of the human organism.

meanings by which humans interpret existence. A cosmogony, as a mythical representation of reality, is a form of cosmology, based on specific types of insides — mainly emotional — that humans did had in the past, in one of their historical stages of development. Modern cosmologies are much more rationalized. They are based on facts, on abstract principles, and on philosophical schemes. Therefore, while being the critic of cosmologies, philosophy also is the “critic of abstractions” or “modes of abstraction”⁴. Whitehead’s most complex endeavor is the construction of such a cosmology. Namely, the construction of a set of abstractions that can describe in most general, metaphysical, terms the way different facts about reality and fundamental modes of thought and of feeling are intertwined. His cosmology is a philosophical cosmology based on different human enduring types of experience, including science and religion. Although the concreteness of experience plays such a significant role in Whitehead’s way of understanding philosophy, he firmly situates philosophy into the realm of abstractions:

In other words, philosophy is explanatory of abstraction, and not of concreteness. It is by reason of their instinctive grasp of this ultimate truth that, in spite of much association with arbitrary fancifulness and atavistic mysticism, types of platonic philosophy retain their abiding appeal; they seek the forms in the facts. Each fact is more than its forms, and each form ‘participates’ throughout the world of facts.⁵

Still, we must differentiate between metaphysics and cosmology⁶. The latter is broadly an application of metaphysics to specific theoretical problems from other research fields. This is why *Process and Reality* is subtitled *An Essay in Cosmology*, because the applicative dimension is essential for the validation of a metaphysical scheme: “Also, it must be one of the motives of a complete cosmology to construct a system of ideas which brings the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests into relation with those concepts of the world which have their origin in natural science.”⁷ The cosmological side of philosophy is the application of a speculative scheme designed with the purpose to enlighten deeper generalities and to realize deeper theoretical constructions.

If we are looking for a ‘definition’ of philosophy in the classical sense, my opinion is that we can find such a text at the beginning of the first chapter

⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 59.

⁵ Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh During the Session 1927–1928, Corrected Edition by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 20.

⁶ This observation pertains to Michael Halewood in the article: “The Order of Nature and the Creation of Societies”, in *The Lure of Whitehead*, edited by Nicholas Gaskill and A. J. Nocek (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 365.

⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xii.

of *Process and Reality*, a chapter in which he reveals the task of philosophy with both its sublime seriousness and limits:

Speculative Philosophy is the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted. By this notion of 'interpretation' I mean that everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme. Thus the philosophical scheme should be coherent, logical, and, in respect to its interpretation, applicable and adequate. Here 'applicable' means that some items of experience are thus interpretable, and 'adequate' means that there are no items incapable of such interpretation.⁸

By the terms 'coherence' and 'logical', Whitehead says, the rational side of philosophy is expressed, and by the terms 'applicable' and 'adequate' the empirical side is referred to. This is not only a theoretical distinction, in the sense that for Whitehead, every actual entity has a bipolar constitution, a physical pole and a mental pole, a structure which philosophy itself seems to emulate. A philosophic scheme, being about ultimate problems or about ultimate structures of reality, it "should be 'necessary', in the sense of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience"⁹, the criteria of verification being its internal consistency and its 'communication' with the empirical side, namely with the way in which it brings light upon "immediate matter of fact".

Philosophy and religion

Whitehead is the philosopher of imagination and adventure. He was acutely conscious of the importance of a freely constructive imagination for designing a speculative scheme and he 'interpreted' the life of ideas in human existence, not only in academic preoccupations, as adventurous. He calls the method he conceived for philosophy "imaginative rationalization", which is simply the unfolding of imagination under the guidance of logic¹⁰. Any elevation of our mind and inner self toward relevant ideas and ideals is possible through imaginative strivings. As he said: "The study of philosophy is a voyage towards the larger generalities."¹¹ The main limits imposed upon imaginative rationalization, and so upon the philosophical spirit, is narrowness of thought and of feeling and narrowness of language. As we can see, Whitehead pays much attention both to the requirements of ratio-

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

nality as exposed in logic and mathematics, and to the immense impact of emotionality. It is with the depth of emotion, generally, with which religion can and must influence the human being. Religious experience brings into discussion a kind of emotion which heightens the human mind, in solitude, to the possibility of grasping the permanent side of reality whilst existing within the flux of the actual world:

Religion should connect the rational generality of philosophy with the emotions and purposes springing out of existence in a particular society, in a particular epoch, and conditioned by particular antecedents. Religion is the translation of general ideas into particular thoughts, particular emotions, and particular purposes; it is directed to the end of stretching individual interest beyond its self-defeating particularity. Philosophy finds religion, and modifies it; and conversely religion is among the data of experience which philosophy must weave into its own scheme. Religion is an ultimate craving to infuse into the insistent particularity of emotion that non-temporal generality which primarily belongs to conceptual thought alone.¹²

All the ideas from this quote need to be contextualized in Whitehead's conception of 'actual entities', 'eternal objects', 'process' and 'God', which will be the contents of the following sections.

The description of subjectivity: its possibility and structure

The 'Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness' and the organic vision of reality

Whitehead was a thorough critic of the philosophy behind modern scientific scholarship. He recognized the importance of modern science for the development of a more correct and profound vision of reality — himself being a good mathematician and physician. Yet, he encountered metaphysical 'ideas' which create theoretical and, thus, practical blockages to scientific thinking. His philosophical inquiries began with the search for a new concept of 'nature'. Modern physics seemed to him to be based on a sharp distinction between a 'phenomenological' side of our knowledge about the world and an allegedly 'real scientifically structured' side of the world. It is the distinction between what we perceive and what is the hidden cause of our perception, between the poetic impressions of the world which concentrate upon nuances of sensations — colors, smells, bodily feelings — and the rigorously calculable elements which constitute the

¹² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 15–16.

'true' composition of the objects of our sensations. This sharp distinction is what Whitehead calls "the bifurcation of nature"¹³. The critique of this bifurcation is one of the main sources for understanding the genesis of Whitehead's central metaphysical claims. The focus on experience, a request so dear to him, is in fact the focus on all our different types of knowledge we do receive about the world. There is a genuine contrast between the way modern science generally understands an object in space and time and the way we, as organisms with sensory-organs, perceive the same object. For example, the object under 'analyze' can be a rose which we can admire for its color, shape and perfume. From a 'simple' scientific point of view the important facts about the rose are only its measurable properties, such as its place in space-time and its chemical composition, not its 'poetical' qualities we ascribe to it. At this point Whitehead would say that if we consider only the scientific side by which we experience the rose as being the 'true' reality we are misconceiving highly abstractions for concreteness. What are usually called 'phenomenological' characteristics are in fact, for Whitehead, the most concrete slices of life. The qualitative aspects of the world are not 'simple' constructions of our mind or 'simple' subjective projections, instead they are the core of experience and, as such, of reality. This fallacy is labeled by Whitehead the 'Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness'¹⁴ and its most dangerous, widely accepted, and unquestioned instantiation is the generalization of the property of 'simple location' as all that can be said about the status of an object in space and time. The description of this property is very important because if one understands that Whitehead has a vision opposed to the generalization of this property — described extensively in *Science and the Modern World* — then one can grasp the traits of Whitehead's entire conceptual architecture from *Process and Reality*:

The characteristic common both to space and time is that material can be said to be *here* in space and *here* in time, or *here* in space-time, in a perfectly definite sense which does not require for its explanation any reference to other regions of space-time. Curiously enough this character of simple location holds whether we look on a region of space-time as determined absolutely or relatively. For if a region is merely a way of indicating a certain set of relations to other entities, then this characteristic which I call simple location, is that material can be said to have just these relations of position to the other entities. In fact, as soon as you have settled, however you do settle, what you mean by a definite place in space-time, you can adequately state the relation of a particular material body to space-time by saying

¹³ Cf. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*, translated by Michael Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 38.

¹⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 51.

that it is just there, in that place; and, so far as simple location is concerned, there is nothing more to be said on the subject.¹⁵

Whitehead's 'simple location' resembles Martin Heidegger's 'simple presence' of a being. It is only a 'pointillist' perspective upon things, that, when used for interpreting the flowing interactions between living beings it produces only unbounded and 'cold' accounts. This 'feeling' of coldness or of museum-like stillness is not accidental, but it expresses a fundamental intuition. Whitehead's philosophy develops by taking into consideration this fundamental intuition.

*The ontological principle
and the concept of an 'actual entity'*

The formulation of what Whitehead calls "ontological principle" depends upon what "actual entity" means. First of all, 'entity' has the general meaning of 'existing' or of being, while 'actual' refers to being as a 'particular' in accordance with Descartes' *res vera* and with Aristotle's *ousia*¹⁶. Hence, an 'actual entity' signifies to Whitehead the particular existent, the 'being' of an individual or the individual as what properly 'is' in the actual world. For Whitehead, there is nothing we can adequately speak of as 'existing' unless it is an 'actual entity' and exactly this is the heart of the 'ontological principle'. In Whitehead's own terms: "'Actual entities' — also termed 'actual occasions' — are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going back behind actual entities to find anything more real. (...) The notion of 'substance' is transformed into that of 'actual entity'; (...) The ontological principle can be summarized as: no actual entity, then no reason."¹⁷ Actual entities are the ultimate components of the actual world and this is why they also are the ultimate grounding for any 'reason'. Because Whitehead is rejecting the idea of these ultimate elements as being 'material' in their nature — in accordance with the rejection of simple location as the fundamental property of actual entities —, the structure of an 'actual entity' remains to be thought of as an 'event'. In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead speaks about events in the following manner: "(...) We must start with the event as the ultimate unit of natural occurrence. An event has to do with all that there is, and in particular with all other events. (...)"¹⁸ An event is something describable as 'dynamic', as having a beginning and an

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶ Cf. Ivor Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics: An Introductory Exposition* (London: George Allan and Unwin Ltd., 1965), 21–22.

¹⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18–19.

¹⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 103.

end, as developing, or said in a compact formulation: an event is a process. By the word 'process' we refer to the intimate metaphysical structure of an actual entity. Conceiving of an actual entity as process, several characteristics are already implied. The ontological principle has more than one formulation and in each formulation some of the 'properties' of the structure of an actual entity is revealed. A more complex formulation than the one already quoted, because is introducing other whiteheadian concepts, is this:

The general principle will be termed the 'ontological principle'. It is the principle that everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere. (...) The ontological principle, as here defined, constitutes the first step in the description of the universe as a solidarity of many actual entities. Each actual entity is conceived as an act of experience arising out of data. It is a process of 'feeling' the many data, so as to absorb them into the unity of one individual 'satisfaction'. Here 'feeling' is the term used for the basic generic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question. Feelings are variously specialized operations, effecting a transition into subjectivity.¹⁹

From this passage we can see that the idea of something being a 'process' implies some definite elements: a medium of data out of which it can arise; a 'satisfaction' that is the unique and intimate aim of the existence of an actual entity; a movement from objectivity to subjectivity mediated by 'feelings'; solidarity, which refers to communication and coordination, with other actual entities; and a peculiar idea that "everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere". I will begin by explaining the last idea, out of which the relationship between the other elements will be clarified onward.

Potentiality and the constitution of subjectivity

An actual entity, by being 'actual', it must be somewhere in time and space²⁰. The more difficult issue is with the meaning of 'potentiality' in Whitehead's philosophy. An actual entity does not 'live' forever, but it must perish at one moment. The moment of perishing is at the same time the moment of accomplishing its definiteness. An actual entity while it is in the actual world, as a process, it finds itself in its own becoming, or as Ivor Leclerc is saying: "(...) an *actual* entity is an *acting* entity."²¹ Yet, being in the process

¹⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40–41.

²⁰ This fact, expressed in Whitehead's terms about space and time, means: an actual entity occupies a place in the 'extensive continuum' which characterise, broadly speaking, the dimensionality of the actual world.

²¹ Ivor Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics*, 86.

of its becoming, an actual entity is not in its entirety, is not accomplished, full-developed or at its final shape. Only when it arrives at its 'ending', in the same moment, it makes a transition to the status of 'objective' data for future actual entities. When an actual entity is rising within the actual world, it needs a set of data out of which it can form itself. The 'data' is the specificity of the universe in general and of a medium in particular, with all the laws, the logical and physical constraints and the regularities which themselves were shaped by the coordinated activity of past actual entities. Whitehead distinguishes between "general potentiality" and "real potentiality"²². The first expression is referring to potentiality in its most general sense, namely in the metaphysical sense. The second expression is referring to a narrower meaning of 'potentiality', namely to potentiality as already exhibiting a 'selection' — from the metaphysical potentiality — which constitutes the general functioning of the actual world. This distinction is anticipated in a much clearer passage from *Science and the Modern World*:

In the first place it is an actual course of events, which might be otherwise so far as concerns eternal possibility, but *is* that course. This limitation takes three forms, (i) the special logical relations which all events must conform to, (ii) the selection of relationships to which the events do conform, and (iii) the particularity which infects the course even within those general relationships of logic and causation. Thus this first limitation is a limitation of antecedent selection. So far as the general metaphysical situation is concerned, there might have been an indiscriminate modal pluralism apart from logical or other limitation. But there could not have been these modes, for each mode represents a synthesis of actualities which are limited to conform to a standard.²³

Hence, every actual entity already has, by its nature as an event or process, a fundamental relation with other actual entities. Whitehead affirms that "there is no element in the universe capable of pure privacy"²⁴ and this fact is due to the "experiential togetherness"²⁵ by which any actual entity is organically assimilating elements from other actual entities. We must pay attention to the fact that this "experiential togetherness" is an internal function of an actual entity. Associations of actual entities are named, according to their endurance and number of components, either 'nexus' or 'society'. Yet, every time the idea of experience is involved Whitehead has in mind the actual entity as the only kind of entity that can have experiences. To have an experience means to be in a process of becoming and

²² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 65.

²³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 177–178.

²⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 212.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

this becoming is essentially subjective. 'Subjective' means being confined to the interiority of a particular actual entity, to its own emotional impressions or feelings upon the world. To accentuate this aspect, Whitehead terms these emotional 'markings' of the exteriority, which any actual entity manifests, 'subjective forms'. Subjectivity signifies, first of all, emotionality. Every actual entity is a subject and when it perishes it becomes a "superject"²⁶, which is a transfiguration from the state of being a subject for itself, to the state of being an object for future actual entities. This state of being a 'superject' is what Whitehead calls "objective immortality"²⁷. 'Objective' refers to the fact that after perishing, any actual entity becomes a potentiality for other future entities and in this manner "it belongs to the nature of every 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming'"²⁸, that it becomes part of the 'datum' for future actual entities. 'Objective' means, in a process metaphysics, 'to be objectified' by a subject. 'Immortality' refers to the impossibility of the 'superject' to become further. It simply remains what it is. It remains an 'immortal' object as part of the real potentiality for future actual entities.

The discussion about possibility does not end here. The most important concept in Whitehead's thought that discloses his articulation of this modal notion is that of an 'eternal object'. The realm of metaphysical or general possibility is the realm of eternal objects. An actual entity, to be properly 'actual', must exhibit what in the philosophical tradition are named 'accidental qualities', such as a definite instantiation of a form or a definite nuance of color. We consider this particular composition of qualities that defines an individual object — in the whiteheadian context an actual entity or a society of actual entities — to pertain to the realm of subjectivity and happening. Yet exactly these attributes are, for Whitehead, manifestations of the eternal objects. Ivor Leclerc expresses clearly this idea:

Although they *exist* only as determinants of the definiteness of actual entities, the forms are not merely the forms of *particular* individual actualities, determining the definiteness of those alone and having no relation to others. For example, different actual entities can have the same form. Forms have universality; they are capable of 'informing' various different actualities.²⁹

They are 'eternal' in the sense that they do not involve process³⁰. The classical example is the description of the properties of a mathematical object, as in one of the beautiful situations depicted by Isabelle Stengers:

²⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ivor Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics*, 92.

³⁰ Ibid.

"Consider this circle clumsily drawn by in the sand, perhaps to illustrate a process of reasoning. The wind is erasing its contours, but the "circle" that qualified my experience of the contour will not disappear with the wind."³¹ When a mathematician thinks what is a 'circle', he tries to find the invariable properties that define the concept of the 'circle', a particular drawn circle being only an instantiation of the concept of the 'circle'. It is the kantian *apriority* of pure concepts. This is why, to take another example, when a 'straight line' is defined in mathematics, it is not relevant if you can draw a perfect, actually straight, line, but to understand what the concept of a 'straight line' mathematically implies and presupposes. Whitehead is applying the same thought to our sensory experience which is extremely refined. This is why, for him, the 'Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness' based on the bifurcation of nature is such a great problem. Our 'phenomenological' impressions are, in fact, hints of eternal objects that are actualized by being part of the definiteness of actual entities. Whitehead employs the term 'ingression' to refer to the insertion of eternal objects into the constitution of actual entities. A question remains about what is an eternal object apart from its ingressions. In *Science and the Modern World* there are some enlightening passages. He specifies here that an eternal object is qualified by two metaphysical principles: firstly, by its "individual essence", which refers only to the fact that it is what it is — an eternal object, being devoid of a process of becoming, is already in 'possession' of an identity; secondly, an eternal object is qualified by its "relational essence", which means that it cannot be divorced from its connectedness both with all the other eternal objects and with the actual entities³².

The process of concrescence and the value of subjectivity

An actual entity is unique. By its sheer existence it is an element of novelty and, for it to be possible as it is, it presupposes a selection from the realm of eternal objects and from its datum: "(...) The individuality of an actual entity involves an exclusive limitation. This element of 'exclusive limitation' is the definiteness essential for the synthetic unity of an actual entity. This synthetic unity forbids the notion of *mere* addition to the included elements."³³ Any element included in the process of becoming of an actual entity is organically assimilated because is in the nature of a 'process' to organically bound different components. This is why an actual entity can be analyzed from the standpoint of its constitutive compounds while remaining one irreducible entity. Therefore, to speak about an actual entity means to speak about its becoming and this process is named by Whitehead "con-

³¹ Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead*, 155.

³² Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 159–160.

³³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 45.

conrescence”³⁴. The particle ‘con-’ is a suggestion of the synthetic, constructive and unique character of this process. Any novelty that occurs within the actual world is a new and unrepeatable conrescence. Is the process that defines actuality as ‘actuality’:

‘Conrescence’ is the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the ‘many’ to its subordination in the constitution of the novel one.

The most general term ‘thing’ — or, equivalently, ‘entity’ — means nothing else than to be one of the ‘many’ which find their niches in each instance of conrescence. Each instance of conrescence *is itself* the novel individual ‘thing’ in question. There are not ‘the conrescence’ and ‘the novel thing’: when we analyze the novel thing we find nothing but the conrescence. ‘Actuality’ means nothing else than this ultimate entry into the concrete, in abstraction from which there is mere nonentity. In other words, abstraction from the notion of ‘entry into the concrete’ is a self-contradictory notion, since it asks us to conceive a thing as not a thing.³⁵

At the same time, a fundamental fact about the process of conrescence is that it presupposes, by its nature, the openness of an actual entity to other actual entities. The conrescence needs a datum out of which it can build the unity of the actual entity. The idea of a becoming entity implies the fact of gradual assimilation. From the most primitive interconnections with the world, to the most complex — the human mind being, of course, an example of complex interaction with the actual world —, the conrescence is describable as a process of growth. Accordingly, the most important fact about actuality — about ‘being’ — is the fact of growth, which can take place only by integration of novel experiences. This integration is realizable through what Whitehead names ‘feelings’³⁶. Whitehead dedicates several pages to the unfolding of the structure and action of these operations. There are ‘primary’ feelings as simple emotional reactions — which are gradually included into more general types of feelings — and ‘conceptual’ feelings, any other complex feeling being a combination between these types of primary feelings³⁷.

³⁴ The other fundamental process is named “transition” and it refers to the passing from one actual entity, after it transfigures itself into a ‘superject’, to other actual entity; transition constitutes what we regularly perceive as ‘time’; the process of conrescence is not temporal, Whitehead making a distinction between process and temporality, which for the purpose of the present paper is not relevant, but which certainly represents a great theoretical innovation.

³⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 211.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

The distinction between physical feelings and conceptual feelings expresses another characteristic of an actual entity, namely its bipolarity. For Whitehead, any actual entity is already oriented towards both the physical and the mental aspects of existence: "Each actuality is essentially bipolar, physical and mental, and the physical inheritance is essentially accompanied by a conceptual reaction partly conformed to it, and partly introductory of a relevant novel contrast, but always introducing emphasis, valuation, and purpose. (...)"³⁸ With its physical side, an actual entity can acknowledge the actual world and with its conceptual side it can acknowledge the generalities or abstractions that 'inform' the actual world. These abstractions are what in the history of philosophy were termed 'categories'. These 'classical' categories or platonic ideas are the eternal objects and an actual entity is developing upon ingression of eternal objects. In Whitehead's vision, these 'abstractions' and the 'particulars' — either an actual entity or a society — coexist in the actual world. When we perceive a landscape we have the complex experience both of particulars and of generalities. Thus, the bipolarity of an actual entity, being an internal structural trait of its concrescence, is the 'condition of possibility' for that actual entity to have an experience organized as it actually is: a complex of physical and conceptual feelings. This is a metaphysical fact because any actual entity is constituted in this way. For Whitehead, any actual entity is a subject. Actual entities are exhibiting degrees of complexity, but this difference of level does not modify the metaphysical nature of an 'actual entity'. This is what Whitehead calls the "reformed subjectivist principle"³⁹. The reformation consists in the rejection of the 'subject' conceived as a static substance independent of its qualities. The traditional notion of 'subject' is also a consequence of the bifurcation of nature, which finds its origination in the traditional Ancient Greek metaphysics of 'subject' and 'predicate'. Whitehead keeps the idea of a 'subject' of experiences, but is a subject defined by its mode of being in the world, namely as an evolving event.

Significantly, all this discussion about the structure of the actual entity, as a concrescing event, aims at the understanding of one fact: that, apart from actuality there is no value. The realm of general possibility composed of all the eternal objects, being as it is, does not imply any kind of differentiation. They have equal status. Only with the ingression into a concrescence do hierarchies of relevance appear. Therefore, an actual entity exhibits a principle of limitation. Being an individuality, a subject, a particular, it has some characteristics and at the same time is does not have other characteristics⁴⁰. For value to be existent, a selective gesture

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁰ Physical and conceptual feelings are what Whitehead calls "positive prehensions". A 'prehension' is a general term that refers to all the operations by which an actual entity

must be made. In Whitehead's formulation: "(...) Restriction is the price of value. There cannot be value without antecedent standards of value, to discriminate the acceptance or rejection of what is before the envisaging mode of activity. Thus there is an antecedent limitation among values, introducing contraries, grades, and opposition."⁴¹ Values are enduring patterns of relationships. Usually, they preserve and enrich life. Whitehead is not referring to specific values⁴², human or ethological, because he is constructing a metaphysical scheme. Whitehead is interested in the structure of 'value' and this structure presupposes endurance of patterns. Yet, values come into being with the existence of limitations imposed by the nature of actual entities: "For the actuality is value."⁴³ This idea, of 'limitation' related to 'value', is essential in this article because God, in one of its functions, is the primordial actual entity which, due to this primary status, acts as an original limitation for the actual world.

God and the fulfillment of actuality

God and creativity

A legitimate question that can be raised regarding the metaphysical landscape exposed so far is about the origins of the actual world. Whitehead's vision should account for the preset configuration of the world. Actual entities are the ground for reason and the ground for value. Yet, how did it all begin? In *Science and the Modern World* appears the first mention to 'God' as an explicit reference to the relation of this concept with Whitehead's system⁴⁴. 'God' is the "ultimate limitation"⁴⁵. Having this position, God realizes the primordial selection among eternal objects and sets the path for values. Yet, although God performs this function, is not clear how he himself came into being. From the manner in which Whitehead writes at this moment one can sense the difficulties he encounters in thinking about this limit-concept. I will quote the passage at length because is worth remarking

appropriates its datum; 'feelings' are positive because there are actually felt by the actual occasions; 'negative prehensions' are not feelings because they refer to the negative relation an actual entity has to the realm of possibility, namely the relation to what it is not; I only wanted to mention this distinction to bear in mind that Whitehead was very attentive concerning 'negative propositions' and the negative relation actuality has to potentiality.

⁴¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 178.

⁴² Michael Halewood, "Fact, Values, Individuals, and Others: Towards a Metaphysics of Value", in *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought*, edited by Roland Farber, Brian G. Henning and Clinton Combs (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2010), 227.

⁴³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 105.

⁴⁴ Cf. John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, second edition (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 84.

⁴⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 178.

the struggle this concept imposes upon a mind who forced itself until the peak of abstract thinking:

In this argument the point to notice is, that what is metaphysically indeterminate has nevertheless to be categorically determinate. We have come to the limit of rationality. For there is a categorical limitation which does not spring from any metaphysical reason. There is a metaphysical need for a principle of determination, but there can be no metaphysical reason for what is determined. If there were such a reason, there would be no need for any further principle: for metaphysics would already have provided the determination. The general principle of empiricism depends upon the doctrine that there is a principle of concretion which is not discoverable by abstract reason. What further can be known about God must be sought in the region of particular experiences, and therefore rests on an empirical basis. In respect to the interpretation of these experiences, mankind have differed profoundly. He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used them.⁴⁶

Whitehead insists that if we want to conceive of God as absolutely good, then is necessary to think of him as the ultimate limitation. If God is thought of as the cause for anything, without discrimination, then we enter into the theoretical problem of explaining the source of evil because we cannot conceive of God as good and unselective at the same time. Our religious intuitions are telling us that God is good. In Whitehead's vision from *Science and the Modern World*, God is the cause for goodness because, as a limitation principle, he sustains the coming into being of novel actual entities. Something that supports life cannot be at the same time destructive. The metaphysical reason for God's goodness whilst in the actual world does exist evil is that God is not misconceived as being also the ultimate "substantial activity"⁴⁷. This 'substantial activity' is the sheer continually creation of novel entities: "Each individual activity is nothing but the mode in which the general activity is individualized by the imposed conditions."⁴⁸ Whitehead further specifies that this activity underlies all actual entities, despite itself not being an entity whatsoever. This activity is called in *Process and Reality* 'creativity'. Whitehead's full 'categorical' scheme from *Process and Reality* is divided into four classes: eight Categories of Existence; twenty-seven Categories of Explanation; nine Categorical Obligations and the Category

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178-179.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 177.

of the Ultimate. All these classes of categories are in fact metaphysical rules or principles which accounts for the generative structure of existence. The Category of the Ultimate is single because it refers to the one-encompassing reality which is creativity itself: "'Creativity' is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. It lies in the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity."⁴⁹ God is not creativity and save to this fact, it can be absolute good. In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead still was puzzled about where to situate God. *Religion in the Making* is the book where Whitehead starts to use the word 'creativity' and where he decides that God is an actual entity.⁵⁰

God: its primordial and consequent nature

The metaphysical meaning of 'evil', for Whitehead, is the fact itself of perishing. A subject becomes a 'superject' at its moment of perishing, thus becoming an objective, definite, entity for future actual entities. Yet, the idea of simply ending the activity of being and of the impossibility of further evolving is very sad... A shaking image is that of the rise and fall of empires, cultures, great lives of great humans, of ideas and of values. This is the ultimate meaning of 'evil' for Whitehead. In his thinking, conscience is intensified by contrasts and the paired contrasts of life and death, of ideals and actual facts, of the possibilities of development for a human being and its actual course of existence, are both a source for terrible emotional obstructions and an immense conceptual foothold toward deepen insights about life and reality:

In the temporal world, it is the empirical fact that process entails loss: the past is present under an abstraction. But there is no reason, of any ultimate metaphysical generality, why this should be the whole story. The nature of evil is that the characters of things are mutually obstructive. Thus the depths of life require a process of selection. But the selection is elimination as the first step towards another temporal order seeking to minimize obstructive modes. Selection is at once the measure of evil, and the process of its evasion. It means discarding the element of obstructiveness in fact. (...)

In our cosmological construction we are, therefore, left with the final opposites, joy and sorrow, good and evil, disjunction and conjunction—that is to say, the many in one—, flux and permanence, greatness and triviality, freedom and necessity, God and the World. In this list, the pairs of opposites are in

⁴⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

⁵⁰ Cf. John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 91.

experience with a certain ultimate directness of intuition, except in the case of the last pair. God and the World introduce the note of interpretation. They embody the interpretation of the cosmological problem in terms of a fundamental metaphysical doctrine as to the quality of creative origination, namely, conceptual appetite and physical realization. This topic constitutes the last chapter of *Cosmology*.⁵¹

Whitehead's metaphysics has a classically rounded scaffolding, an impression conveyed especially by the last part of *Process and Reality*, whose core is the interpretation of God's nature. For Whitehead, God has a double-sided constitution: its 'primordial nature' and its 'consequent nature'. The primordial nature of God corresponds to its role as a limitation principle for actuality. From the fact that he is not the Category of the Ultimate, which is creativity, does not derive that it occupies an inferior position or that it has a weakened importance. As John B. Cobb Jr. specifies, actual entities, eternal objects, creativity and God have equal importance as ultimate metaphysical elements of reality — with the observation that because God is an actual entity, precisely the primary one, these two concepts can be compressed⁵². If God is the primordial actual entity, then he can 'envisage' the full realm of general possibility, which means he can realize an "ordering of potentiality"⁵³, with the following specification, mentioned by John B. Cobb Jr.: "The primordial ordering does not impose a deterministic order. That would not contribute to the realization of value. It is called the principle of limitation, because it excludes many abstract possibilities. But it does not restrict the potentials to one. For this reason most laws are statistical. It is also for this reason that truly new things come into existence."⁵⁴ An important distinction must be made between 'value' and 'valuation'⁵⁵. An actual entity, by being what it is, intrinsically makes valuations. Its concrescence is both a process of growth and a process of valuation. The ingression of eternal objects into the concrescence of an actual entity is possible only as valuation. As Michael Halewood verified, there are not many occurrences of the noun 'value' in *Process and Reality*, yet there are many occurrences of the verb 'valuation'⁵⁶, which is in accordance with the focus of the entire speculative thought on experience, act and process. This primordial nature is permitting God to have an essential and intimate linkage with the 'subjective aim' of any actual entity. God's aim is the universal fulfillment of value, the maximum intensity of value attainment, because is the only possible aim for the primordial actual entity. Yet, in the actual world many

⁵¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 340–341.

⁵² Cf. John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 91.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cf. Michael Halewood, "Fact, Values, Individuals, and Others", 231.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

possibilities are broken, cut off, ceased or banned from actualization. These obstacles against actualization are a more particularized meaning of 'evil'. In Whitehead's vision, God is providing the ideals of attainment, but it also depends on the actual flow of events and on the actual entity's decisions if these ideals of attainment — expressed first and foremost in the particular subjective aim of every actual entity — are actually reached. In human lives this state of affairs is a great source for struggle and dissatisfaction. If you have a gift for music, then the ideal future is that in which you can nourish and bring into blooming this gift. Otherwise, you will feel your entire life a taste of bitterness and a longing for fulfillment.

The consequent nature of God is a truly ingenious speculative movement. If God is conceived as an actual entity, then it must exhibit the metaphysical traits of any actual entity. Accordingly, an actual entity has a bipolar structure: it has a mental pole and a physical pole. Because God is the primordial actual entity, he can 'envisage' the full set of eternal objects. This 'envisaging' constitutes the function of its mental pole. How is God manifesting its physical pole? The answer is by letting himself being influenced by the actions, feelings and thoughts of every actual entity. God can 'embrace' the whole actuality, hence he can 'accompany' every actual entity ever to be. An important aspect of God is that he does not exhibit temporality. Is one major distinction between him and all the other actual entities. As John B. Cobb Jr. clarifies:

God is contrasted with all others by virtue of being "nontemporal" (...) He must include in himself a synthesis of the total universe. There is, therefore, in God's nature the aspect of the realm of forms as qualified by the world, and the aspect of the world as qualified by the forms. His completion, so that He is exempt from transition into something else, must mean that his nature remains self-consistent in relation to all change.⁵⁷

The supreme opposition between God and the World is expressed by this difference: that God is everlasting, while every actual entity must perish. Still, God and the World are in an inescapable relation of complementarity and reciprocity:

For God the conceptual is prior to the physical, for the World the physical poles are prior to the conceptual poles. (...) But no two actualities can be torn apart: each is all in all. Thus each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God. In God's nature, permanence is primordial and flux is derivative from the World: in the World's nature, flux is primordial and permanence is derivative from God. Also the World's nature is a primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial datum for the World. Creation achieves the recon-

⁵⁷John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology*, 90.

ciliation of permanence and flux when it has reached its final term which is everlastingness—the Apotheosis of the World.⁵⁸

God, because is characterized by primordially, completion and everlastingness, it can keep within his experience — as in the history of philosophy and theology was said, in his 'memory' —, with tenderness, everything that was achieved in the past and, also, he can understand, from his supreme position, even the 'evilness' of the actual world as part of the building of goodness. In Whitehead's elegant formulation: "(...) He does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."⁵⁹

The solitary vision of ideals

Whitehead believed in the power of ideals to transfigure our lives and through this particular transfiguration to modify even the activity of the universe. This belief is a consequence of his metaphysics, yet at the same time is simply a common observation of facts. Religion is the expression of the power of ideals upon the intimate becoming of a human being⁶⁰. According to *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead's single dedicated book to the religious phenomenon, the main effect a religious feeling has upon one's self is that of 'purifying'⁶¹. He mentions that life is first of all a matter of interiority which, although conditioned by the exterior life, receives its final quality from the life within one's being. Therefore, religion is the "art and theory of inner life"⁶², that region of existence which connects man with the aspect of permanence within the world. In *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead develops a perspective upon the history of religion similar with the anthropological accounts. For example, he thinks that religion has four main elements, at the same time stages of its evolution, through which it exhibits its intuitions: ritual, emotion, belief and rationalism⁶³. The connection between rationality and religion is a surprising one. Firstly, in *Religion in the Making* Whitehead speaks about "rational religion" as that religion in which belief, ritual and emotion are reorganized with the aim of making its claims the central element of a coherent life, a life pointing to a unification

⁵⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁶⁰ There are interesting attempts in process theology to redefine traditional theological concepts, such as the 'soul', using whiteheadian categories; for example, the 'soul' can be conceived as a society of actual entities with a centered organization, Cf. John B. Cobb Jr.'s whiteheadian *Christian Natural Theology*, 18–24.

⁶¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* [in Romanian], translation and glossary by Alexandru Anghel, with an introductory study by Ovidiu Cristian Nedu (Bucharest: Herald, 2010), 64.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 67.

of ethical approbation of behavior and clarity of thought⁶⁴. Secondly, in *Science in the Modern World*, he thought about the Middle Ages period that it was an epoch of rationality — because it sustained a teleological doctrine that gave reason to the order of nature — and that the scientific ‘rebellion’ was, in fact, a manifestation of irrationality⁶⁵. I think the most important observation that Whitehead makes about religion is the enlightening of the relation between universality and solitude⁶⁶ in religious experience. A religious experience is a solitary vision of ideals and ideals are the sole grounding for optimism because they represent the fundamental support for justifying life despite sufferings:

The immediate reaction of human nature to the religious vision is worship. Religion has emerged into human experience mixed with the crudest fancies of barbaric imagination. Gradually, slowly, steadily the vision recurs in history under nobler form and with clearer expression. It is the one element in human experience which persistently shows an upward trend. It fades and then recurs. But when it renews its force, it recurs with added richness and purity of content. The fact of the religious vision, and its history of persistent expansion, is our one ground of optimism. Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience.⁶⁷

To gain a more profound intuition of universality one must assume its own journey in life. The idea of ‘journey’ presupposes openness towards otherness and by integration of this contrastive experience the growth in complexity of inside is attained. Narrowness of living, of thinking and of feeling is against the elevation towards the ultimate truth about everlastingness. This is the reason why a purified religion is a religion that embraces the concept of the ‘world’⁶⁸. The religious vision is a moment of glancing at the divine landscape of absolute beauty and goodness.

Some remarks concerning a possible dialogue between process philosophy and Eastern Orthodox Christianity following suggestions from the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga

Whitehead’s philosophy is labeled by himself a ‘philosophy of organism’. The organic character of his thinking is due to many of his ideas, from which the following are only few of them: the focus upon process;

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 12–16.

⁶⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 89.

⁶⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 192.

⁶⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 83.

the importance of interaction between actual entities; the event-structure of an 'actual entity'; the bipolarity of actual entities; the metaphysical importance of emotionality and the relevance of experiences for designing an appropriate speculative scheme. The critique Whitehead brings against the bifurcation of nature and the generalization of materialistic principles is also an important argument for understanding his philosophy as essentially a philosophy of organism. Even from his way of writing one can observe the refined balance between rigorous logic and poetic depictions that characterizes both the architecture and the contents of his metaphysics. I believe, in accordance with whiteheadian principles, that a great philosopher should be defined by width of imaginative thinking. Narrowness of ideas and philosophical depth contradict each other. An organic view is intrinsically a view of openness. How can process philosophy, as a philosophy of organism enter into a nourishing dialogue with the Orthodox Christianity from the East side of Europe? This question is significant for the present article because it does what Whitehead would have wanted from at least two points of view: firstly, he thought that application is important for the validation of a scheme of thought and an open dialogue — which means an interaction out of which both parts are accepting the possibility that their position could be modified after this new intellectual and emotional experience — with the conceptuality of one theology is a route to a possible application; secondly, Whitehead believed that philosophy and religion can and should change according to their exchange of ideas, concepts and experiences. Religion cannot avoid creativity, at least in a whiteheadian metaphysical framework. Hence, it is compelled to reinforce itself by integrating new religious experiences and new conceptual structures. As philosophy is compelled to take into serious consideration religion because is one of the most significant areas of human thinking and feeling.

Speaking about Orthodox Christianity, I will remain in the field of philosophy by making appeal to some remarks a Romanian philosopher made about this religion, namely Lucian Blaga. Blaga himself had a complex education: as a theologian, as a biologist and as a philosopher. Therefore, he had a profound perspective upon the areas of research essential for the present paper. In one of the books that forms his *Trilogy of Culture*, Blaga speaks at length about the main religions of the world in the context of his complex philosophy of culture. About Orthodox Christianity he explicitly say that it is a form of religious experience that centers on the way of living. It is a religion that rises in the soul from the holy word like a flower blossoms after it has grown from its seed. Blaga is saying further that "its destiny is like that of a plant's growth"⁶⁹. Lucian Blaga also is one of the great Romanian poets. This fact is significant because for Whitehead

⁶⁹ Lucian Blaga, *The Trilogy of Culture* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 195.

man is expressing the most profound contrasts of reality, like the contrast between permanence and flux, in poetry. In *Science and the Modern World* he dedicates a whole chapter to the general analyze of the great English romantic poets, especially to Wordsworth and Shelley, as a proof of a way of thinking that disavows the bifurcation of nature and the generalization of the property of simple location. Hence, the fact that Lucian Blaga is a poet and a philosopher, with theological and scientific training, is an indication of a possible acute sense of reality in its conceptual-ideal side. More suggestions about Orthodox Christianity in Blaga's writing we can find when he describes the authentic orthodox monk. He is saying that the belief of such a monk becomes an 'organic substance' within his being. The monk's belief shines from within towards the exterior. It is a simple and natural belief that reveals a deep life of the unconscious. His existence is an "organic existence" that communicates a spiritual atmosphere which managed through him to become "flesh and body"⁷⁰. These are just suggestive poetic depictions of a modality of living a religious belief. Yet, they are suggestions that I think theologians can deepen if they connect them with Whitehead's organic philosophy. Every religious experience is a manifestation of intensity of emotion and of purity of feeling, but every religion and every culture is giving its own stamp on this universally important experience.

Conclusions

Whitehead's metaphysics is substantial, complex and generous in regard to the set of contemporary issues which it can enlighten, or at least contextualize. For example, the way it conceptualizes God is a beautiful and logical synthesis between intuitions from the history of philosophy and personal observations. God is a support for optimism, is absolute good, it preserves into everlastingness the events of the actual world and is the source of ideals. Yet, Whitehead introduces novel distinctions that shed a different light on the relevance of the concept of God for cosmology: on the one hand, the distinction between God as the primordial and non-temporal actual entity and creativity as the Category of the Ultimate; on the other hand, the distinction between the primordial nature of God, which is a principle of limitation and 'envisages' the full realm of general possibility, and its consequent nature, which continues to enrich God's experience of the World through the assimilation of novel definite actualities. Whitehead is attentive about the emotional proofs of religious experience and at the same time is keeping a critical distance against theoretical interpretations of this experience.

⁷⁰Ibid., 200.

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