

The non-substantialistic turn in Whitehead's philosophy: Its meaning, its limits

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In his chapter *Objects and Subjects of Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead notes that

There is (...) a general continuity between human experience and physical occasions. The elaboration of such a continuity is one most obvious task for philosophyⁱ.

So, all of Whitehead's Philosophy could be interpreted as a reaction against any false dualism, that is to say a dualism appearing *by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact* (AI, 245). For one important function of the philosophy should be to elaborate a general scheme which could be exemplified by this *concrete fact*. At the same page, Whitehead proposes some historical examples of those dualisms:

The dualism in the later Platonic dialogues between the Platonic 'souls' and the Platonic 'physical' nature, the dualism between the Cartesian 'thinking substances' and the Cartesian 'extended substances', the Lockian 'human understanding' and the Lockian 'external things' described for him by Galileo and Newton — all these kindred dualisms are here found within each occasion of actualityⁱⁱ.

But the major reaction, to my opinion, was against a dualism which would control all the others, namely the dualism of substance and accidents. We shall first examine this whiteheadian reaction to what we might call an original dualism. I would like then to tentatively establish that his refusal

of the "substance vs. accidents" model leads to a re-consideration of the basic structure of the universe, with his conception of *eternal objects*, which, taken as a whole, are constituting the starting point of any datum for actual occasions, for

Each occasion has its physical inheritance and its mental reaction which drives it on to its self-completionⁱⁱⁱ.

This consideration of *eternal objects*, such as they are transmitted in this *physical inheritance*, implies that one should revisit the God's traditional conception, (by example that of Aristotle's metaphysics). What remains then is the cosmological function of this God. But Whitehead sees him as being, not an ultimate transcendent actuality, giving the world its justification: rather as an exemplification of what should be to him a complete fact. Thus, we shall be able to understand the capacity of Whitehead's metaphysics to define what is the ultimate coherence of our lives, starting from the world we are living in.

A. The "Revolt against dualism" of substance and accidents in Whitehead's philosophy

By this "revolt", Whitehead is considering that he is opposed to the whole occidental tradition, founded upon the Plato's earlier conception of the absolute substances and the Aristotle's view of the cosmos as a general network of interrelated substances^{iv}. The predicative pattern makes then it possible to characterize those substances by common qualities, usually shared by all or several entities. Hence, there is a two-level conception of reality:

- Fundamental realities, which conform to the platonic model of absolute ideas, existing as such;
- Apparent characteristics of those realities, issuing in verbal sentences that present some (substantial or accidental, and universal or particular as well) relations to the first-level realities.

Whitehead, as we all know, is contending that such a construction of cosmic reality has become inadequate if we want to take into account the whole reality. For he is considering that this Aristotelian conception, being convenient as it is for the sake of daily life, could not give an adequate view of the ultimate reality. Indeed, we absolutely need this device to share our impressions with other people. But the recent development of linguistics and logics has shown the traps into which we fall when we give too much credit to that model. I would then like to present the Whitehead's conception about the dualism, even if it is a well-known topic for everyone here.

First of all, we shall examine the whiteheadian criticism of the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*, in order to understand his own definition of concreteness, resulting from the process of concrescence, and to underline the importance of the insistent presence of cosmos for this process.

1. The "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" and "the revolt against dualism" (AI, 245)

If we give some credit to the appearance as a heap of substances, isolated from each other in *presentational immediacy*, we fall, according to Whitehead, into a dualistic view of "substances"

vs. "qualities". The mode of "presentation" is so important for the controls of our lives that we automatically fall into the (illusory) faith that the objects presented are really put together into a unique framework, which we call the world at a first level of truth. Then, every statement about those objects, Whitehead says, will indicate a second-order truth, since it is presupposing a durable relationship between every one of those objects and one or another or all of its qualities. According to this view, there are different levels of enunciation, from objects of first level, considered as a basis for our approach of the world, up to statements more or less intricate, as to their capacity of reflecting a determinate state of affairs. Now, if we intend to relate all of those statements in one and the same coherent framework, we fall into insurmountable difficulties as the authors of *Principia Mathematica* have told us. Whitehead attributes those difficulties to a fragmented vision of the reality, between substances and their qualities. He was always opposed to any form of dualistic vision, since this vision is then lacking the very core of reality, which is presupposed to be coherent and unique. So, if we want this core be manifested, we must, Whitehead says, change our approach of the world. The so called "first level truth", that of the "concrete" substances, with their linguistic support, could hardly be considered as the ultimate, since they are, in themselves considered, the outcome of an activity, the activity of feeling and knowing the events of the world. The only important question should be then: what is happening in our sensitive organs, and in general throughout the whole body, so that we are able to characterize a state of affairs with

sentences considered as true or false? The whole of Whitehead's philosophy could be interpreted as an endeavor to answer this question.

The response, unsatisfying though it is, could be the following: what we name a 'substance' is indeed a convenient instrument, but it bars out any attempt to really understand that our experience is first of all a process. We should be helped, in order to reach this fundamental level of process, by the mathematics of the extensive continuum. For those mathematics are proposing a scheme which make it possible to understand the real structure of the world in terms of process'. What is then the relationship between this conception of process and Whitehead's conception of the concrescence? Is the latter conception more or less appropriate to a metaphysical approach of reality? How is it integrated in the general speculative scheme, by example the speculative scheme of *Process and Reality*?

2. The role of concrescence

At a microscopic level, the process of concrescence could be characterized as a development of prehensions, each of them exemplifying, not any isolated fixed support, but the whole world's creative advance. The perplexity here is to articulate this microscopic approach to that, macroscopic, of the complete evolution of the cosmos, just like what realized Spinoza, with a *Deus sive natura* being the only substance. We shall examine this question in the part 2. Let us now describe what the whiteheadian process of concrescence looks like, in itself considered, at its

microscopic level. It seems to me that this question of the definition of concrescence has remained until now quite unclear. Indeed, according to the explanations that Whitehead himself developed in his *Process and Reality*, we could say that the concrescence is an interweaving of primary prehensions, the first of them being "physical", and the other as much "conceptual "as" physical".

What means then *physical prehension*? It is, I think, a grasping of the whole universe, such as it is manifested in the ("presentational") mode of spatio-temporality, at a definite point of the spatio-temporal continuum. This very grasping is in itself a new actuality, which will then be re-grasped by other actualities, emerging from a new definite point of spatio-temporal continuum. What is transmitted, from one prehension to another is the world, just *envisaged* from the *point of view* of the antecedent prehension. Thus, a concrescence is growing up from prehension to prehension, till some quality of the given continuum may emerge, as a defining characteristic of this concrescence, for a *public matter of fact* named by Whitehead its *nexus*. In its turn, this quality may either be attached to the datum, or define the subjective activity itself, particularly in complex occasions as the human conscience.

No need to say how much such a conception of the concrescence has been important for the elaboration of Whitehead's new cosmology. But many issues remain unclear, as to the real status of the concrescence. Let us mention some of them, which are classical perplexities one might come upon with this whiteheadian notion: the so called "ingression" of eternal objects into the

process, the way conceptual prehensions articulate to physical prehensions, the emergence of the subjectification, the real meaning of the distinction between micro-cosmological and macro-cosmological approach, the production of nexus, the appeal to a transcendent entity as a justification of cosmic activities. Of course, all of those issues have been abundantly discussed. But I would like to get back to the crux of those discussions. It seems to me that the only question of Whitehead's cosmology is that of a radical and irreducible dualism, between the "realm" of eternal objects and the development of cosmic actualities. In other words, it is the question, which Whitehead himself has explicitly raised, of the relationships between the totality of eternal objects and their concretion, between the potentialities taken as a whole and their complete actualization: in terms taken from PR's last chapter, between *God and the World*.

3. Back to the perplexing question of the dualism God/World

The only question is then: What kind of reality could make that the creative advance be effective? Eternal objects as such or divine energy, or both of them? When reading some chapters of SMW, as the chapter *Abstraction*, we could think of the cosmos as a unique network of eternal objects. Expressions like *relation, relationship, related* occur almost at every line of this chapter. We could reasonably admit that Leibniz 's cosmology was present on the background, with his theory of the best of possible worlds. For this "best world" could be considered, as Whitehead himself says, as a "realm", analogously to the Leibniz' s general theory of the realms of nature and grace. Of course,

Whitehead assigns to this world an energy, which he will then consider as a divine and primordial nature. But it is precisely this change with regard to Leibniz which could be questioned: This new agency is certainly not a *deus ex machina* which would transcend the world as in Leibniz's case. It is submitted to the general rules of the world. But altogether it is different from the world on one point, according to Whitehead's conception: its first prehensions are conceptual and not physical, as in cosmic occasions. Therefore, it is difficult to see how this novel agent could be related to the world, with such a difference. If, on the one hand, we quite understand that, at the macro-cosmological level of our body, our thinking activity may emerge from the functioning of this body, how could we, on the other hand, admit the inverted process, i.e. the emergence of this same functioning of our body from a divine conceptual actualization? It seems to me that such a device, in order to found our original experience, remains unexplained^{vi}.

So, we are left with a last couple of entities, apparently irreconcilable. For Whitehead, of course, this state of affairs pertains to the very last duality of the reality itself, the *contrast between the unity and multiplicity*^{vii}, which is not a contradiction, rather a *union of opposites*^{viii}, according to which he anticipatively meets Lovejoy's objections about the *revolt against dualism*. I think that is the point we should tentatively clarify now: how could we deduce Whitehead's "natural theology" from this genuine *contrasted* duality?

B. The articulation of eternal objects to actuality, from a non-substantialistic point of view.

At the very beginning of his chapter X in SMW, Whitehead warns his reader:

In the present chapter, and in the immediately succeeding chapter, we will forget the peculiar problems of modern science, and will put ourselves at the standpoint of a dispassionate consideration of the nature of things, antecedently to any special investigation into their details. Such a standpoint is termed 'metaphysical'. Accordingly those readers who find metaphysics, even in two slight chapters, irksome, will do well to proceed at once to the Chapter on "Religion and Science"^{ix}

With this recommendation, Whitehead tells us that we must admit as a philosophical possibility the direct transition from positive (particularly historical) sciences to metaphysics, for a discussion about the relationship between the objects perceived and their ultimate foundation. The central notion which is laid down at the very outset of the chapter is that of eternal objects. When we analyze the facts that are weaving our experience, we discover that those facts could be analyzed into two categories of objects:

- The objects which are forming a united world, under the heading of an "infinite abstractive hierarchy"
- The objects which together constitute the "vertex" of "finite abstractive hierarchies".

Hence, the whole of this chapter *Abstraction* could be interpreted as an attempt to relate the hierarchies of the second category to the infinite abstractive hierarchy: the infinite hierarchy embraces the totality of eternal objects, which could be actualized at a precise point of the spatio-

temporality, whereas the finite hierarchies are constituted by the actuality, making an *abrupt* selection. This concept of *abruptness* is very central in this chapter, but also in other passages of SMW, and in PR as well. When the actual occasion is creating its own definition, while emerging from the whole realm of eternal objects, it makes a selection of those objects, focusing either on a particular series of objects (some aspects of the concrete situation), or on particular characteristics of its subjective form (fear, joy, pleasure....etc). In any case, the process of actuality gives the analyze its basis for further research, either with definite and finite series of concepts, or with a series to be indefinitely broadened up to the totality of the cosmos^x. But what is the meaning of this distinction? As we shall see, it constitutes, for Whitehead, the best introduction to a real metaphysics, according to the Aristotle 's meaning of that term. In particular, the concept of God, which is introduced at the outset of the following chapter, seems to be a direct consequence of this presentation of eternal objects.

1. The question of eternal objects in Whitehead's philosophy

With the definition of infinite hierarchies of eternal objects in SMW, we could raise the question of their efficacy: are they active in the constitution of actual occasion, or simply the abstract result of an analysis of this occasion, carried out afterwards according to its exemplification in and by its *connectedness*^{xi}? If we pay attention to the meaning Whitehead is giving to the expression of "abstraction", as opposed to concreteness, we shall see that it could never develop as such any

actuality, because there is nothing apart from actuality. The *fallacy of the misplaced concreteness*, which we already met, indicates without any serious doubt that abstractive activity is coming after the actualization has been effective, to actively recover its characteristics. Hence, it is always a consecutive operation. The effective experience, which is altogether the general presence to the world and the capacity of particular selections, by specific synthesis of those eternal objects, appears then to be the "womb" of every analyze of this experience into its basic elements. For

An actual occasion is a prehension of one infinite hierarchy (its associate hierarchy) together with various finite hierarchies. The synthesis into the occasion of the infinite hierarchy is according to its specific mode of realization, and that of the finite hierarchies is according to various other modes of realization^{xii}.

Thus, the effective experience, either general or particular, is opening the way to that particular operation which we name "abstraction", when we intend to discover what are the ultimate constituents that experience is made of. The principle that is governing this operation of abstraction is that of *the translucency of realization*: the same objects can be grasped in the synthesis of actualization and re-appropriated without any change by logical analysis^{xiii}. Our experience, in any form it may be presented, is through and through guided by this principle. What differs is solely the *subjective form* of actualization, depending on the importance and the level of complexity of that experience. So, even the abstraction might be rightly considered in itself as a concrete operation. Now, according to this conception of the abstraction, what is the meaning of the following chapter about God? There, Aristotle is mentioned as the founder of a cosmological theology, just accepted by Whitehead as an example of a sane approach to a cosmic, non-religious

God. But Whitehead, unlike Aristotle, envisages here God as the only possible actualization of a double cleavage:

- Between the complete realm of possibilities and its concretization (cf. God as *The Principle of Concretion* and of *Limitation*);
- Between this concretization and the emergence of a proper focus of temporalization, with its past, its present manifestation and its future ^{xiv}, which will become in PR *The Reformed Subjectivist Principle*.

In order to understand the development of this conception of God, let us first examine this double rupture.

2. The rupture between the world as a complete realm of possibilities and a particular actual occasion

We already met the concept of *abruptness*, which characterizes any particular selection of eternal objects. It seems to be the most appropriate for a right presentation of this first rupture. It reveals at the same time the importance of the world as a whole and its "incarnation" into a particular occasion. With the proper expressions of the chapter *Abstraction*, we could say that it clarifies the distinction between infinite vs. finite hierarchies: the decision that constitutes any actual occasion represents some "incarnation" of the infinite totality of possibilities from which it is emerging, thus authorizing an analysis of this totality. But this linkage between the finite and infinite hierarchies

leaves us with some baffling questions. For example, could we consider finite hierarchies as a real expression of the importance of the world, at the level of a simply individual actuality? Could we also consider the *infinite abstractive hierarchy* as the common ground for the analysis of all the finite hierarchies? Is that *infinite abstractive hierarchy* itself more than an *abstraction*, falsely taken as a concrete reality, without any proper life or motion? To appropriately answer those questions, we must now pass on to the discussion of the second rupture.

3. The rupture between the objective assemblage of data and its subjectification.

Whitehead answers the question of this rupture in PR (cf. PR 27, *the category of subjective harmony*), with the conception of a pre-established harmony between those data and the becoming of a subject. Of course, one cannot help evoking Leibniz's *Monadology*, since Whitehead himself makes clearly enough the rapprochement at the same page. But is it a genuine similitude? It seems to me that Whitehead's conception of this harmony is based on the belief that everything may enter into the constitution of any subjective activity: Between the development of a concrescence and its becoming as a proper subjective activity, there is such an harmony. For example, feeling the perfume of a rose presupposes as an essential condition that there is an accordance between such a feeling and the objective data that make it possible.

Thus, for Whitehead in PR, this harmony is intimately present in any actual experience. It is not as in Leibniz, superadded and controlled by God, considered as a transcendent reality. For it is

well known that in Whitehead's cosmology, God cannot be considered as an exception to the general metaphysical principles. So we may not think of our own experience as being controlled by any transcendent reality. It is, in itself, the sole source of our metaphysics, without any recourse to extrinsic explanation. Could therefore the pre-established harmony be anything else than a fact that we experience every day? The philosophical point of Whitehead's metaphysics is here to assert the only importance of actualized subjective experience for everybody, even at the level of the metaphysical activity. The world must be harmonized in itself to be thinkable by everybody. But that does not entail any confidence that this character is indicating any presence of a common God, except if one admits to the principle (postulate?) of the universal "relationality", whose God should be either the author or the supervisor, or at least the main exemplification.

Now, there is some anticipative view of this harmony in SMW. Noteworthy enough, when Whitehead is discussing Leibniz's organic harmony, at the end of the chapter *Science and Philosophy* in SMW, just before the chapter *Abstraction*, he is referring to the Russel's first period, that of his book *The philosophy of Leibniz* (1900). Whitehead's objection to Leibniz's Monadology is that

he did not discriminate the event, as unit of experience, from the enduring organism as its stabilization into importance, and from the cognitive organism as expressing an increased completeness of individualization ^{xv}.

Whitehead is making here the presupposition of three contrasts, which appear to be all relevant in order to define any pre-established harmony: First, that we must admit a distinction between events and enduring organisms, second, a distinction between events and cognitive organisms, third, a distinction between enduring and cognitive organisms. Even if one admits - an hypothesis which is worthy of discussion- that Leibniz missed the first two distinctions, hence the real pre-established harmony, I think he strongly asserted the importance of the last one, with his definition of an harmony between the Realm of Nature and the Realm of Grace. Now, this harmony indicates another reality, which is entirely different from the harmony of the Nature, considered as the locus of events: it is the harmony *between the father and his sons*, such as it is experienced in the *world of morality*, interpreted as the *City of God*. (Monadology, §§ 84 & 86). Even if one admits with Whitehead that the real pre-established harmony must appear through an individual experience, this very harmony should be extended without any discussion to the domain of moral and even religious experience. With this moral experience, we are experiencing a new kind of harmony, which cannot be demonstrated, just displayed.

So we are left with two major perplexities, when discussing the whole chapter of SMW about abstraction:

- The difficult passage from initial data, forming together the world as a background, to the final objective construction of a new actual occasion;

- The "translucent" and parallel transformation of this final construction into a particular actualization, with its own subjective form, uneasy to be thought of, though trivially experienced by anybody in every domain of human practice.

Both of those perplexities result from the fact that the harmony is not created, but only presupposed, by our proper experience, even our moral experience. Being a presupposition for any metaphysical investigation, that harmony justifies at the same time its validity and its limits for a complete metaphysical investigation. So we must now go on with our analysis, to tentatively understand what could be the meaning of the theological response of Whitehead to this conceptual challenge.

C. The evolution of Whitehead's conception of God, from SMW to PR

Till now, we have not evocated the whiteheadian conceptions of God, neither that of SMW nor that of PR in themselves, but only in their relationships to the actualities of the world. Nevertheless, the two perplexities that we just mentioned above lead us to revisit now Whitehead's natural theology. My intention is not here to resolve the two difficulties, in order to explain away the relationships between the world and its transcendent origin, but to envisage in what sense Whitehead's responses to those difficulties could be considered as metaphysically meaningful. A first indication on the way we could follow is given by Whitehead's own evolution, specifically between SMW and PR.

1. The God of SMW

As we know, God is characterized in the chapter *God* of SMW as *The Principle of Concretion*, that is to say the principle governing the first passage we mentioned above, between the world as a totality of eternal objects and its fragmented actualization into indefinitely different actual occasions. He is, as Whitehead says at the end of the chapter, *conceived as the supreme ground for limitation*^{xvi}. It is likely that Whitehead would have evoked some philosophers as Spinoza or Leibniz, or Bergson, to give us an illustration of this *ground*, since those authors are often mentioned throughout SMW. But how Whitehead is meeting the second difficulty, about the subjectification of such an actual occasion? Nothing has been said on this question in SMW. I think the only anticipation of it was the conception of the *triple envisagement*^{xvii}. It is to be noted that the first mention of this notion is presented about an *underlying eternal energy* or an *underlying activity*^{xviii}. What is here at stake is the capacity of this energy or activity to be developed in three stages, each of them contributing a real creation of temporality, with its recollection of the past, its realization of the actual present, and its creation of a future for other actualities. The subjective bias is only present in as far as those dimensions of time are discussed. In the chapter about *God*, Whitehead relates a *graded* envisagement to the abruptness already mentioned. But he is not so clear as before about the three stages of this envisagement. We could say that when his conception of envisagement is clearly presented, it is not related to God, and

conversely when he applies it to God, it is not so rigorously presented. So we have in SMW, as L.S.Ford has analyzed it, some anticipation of PR' s views about God, but not yet a definite vision of the natures of God. The only principles that give us a first representation of how Whitehead is thinking of God are the two principles already mentioned of *Translucency* and of *Concretion*. According to the first principle, as defined at the end of the chapter *Abstraction*, the eternal objects remain absolutely identical during their *passage* into reality so that they could be indefinitely manifested in other actualizations as well. According to the second, this very passage is made possible by the divine aiming at actualization of potentialities. But both principles are still insufficient to take into account the world's aiming at the future.

According to this orientation, the actual occasion has become a lure for other feelings, opening to novel potentialities to be accounted for in the development of the creative advance. This dimension corresponds to that of the third envisagement, such as it is evoked in SMW, about the *underlying activity*:

...the envisagement of the actual matter of fact which must enter into the total situation which is achievable by the addition of the future ^{xix}

This third envisagement, not yet related to any conception of God, could be compared to the 18th *category of explanation* in PR, which defines the ontological principle as a *principle of efficient and final causation* ^{xx}: The actualization of an entity introduces into the world some final novelty. This actuality becomes then an efficient factor of concrescence for novel actualities in the future.

It is precisely this ontological principle that will be represented in PR by the concept of the *superjective nature of God*, as we shall see. God is not only the principle of concretion, aiming at the actualization of every potentiality. He is himself the ontological principle, making it possible to maintain this world as a womb of future actualizations. Let us now examine how the triple envisagement of SMW, whose value was limited to the evolution of the actual entities in the world, becomes in PR the genuine definition of God, as opposed and complementary to the world.

2. The clarification of the conception of God in PR

Very much has been written on this topic. The only remark I would make concerns the metaphysical meaning of this shift of vocabulary, in Whitehead's philosophical evolution from SMW to PR. My point is that to my eyes Whitehead has not significantly changed his mind about God, between 1925 and 1929. He has simply clarified the expression of its prior intuitions. One of those anticipations is that the world, taken as a whole and not only in its obviously biological elements, is submitted to an evolution, which combines the two sides of *a given environment* and of *creativity*^{xxi}. This general feature of the world will be presented in PR as the category of the ultimate, whose meaning will be clarified with the categoreal obligations (4th series of categories). Those categories define the philosophical attitude of Whitehead, when he tentatively sketches the structure of the world.

Then, we could demonstrate how, in the *Categorical Scheme* of PR, the second and third series of categories (respectively the *categories of existence* and *the categories of explanation*) give us some clarification on the meaning of Whitehead's God, since they define, as far as the third series is concerned, the set of principles that govern the creative advance, and for the second series, the objects which are thus constructed on this basis. God appears then to be, as Whitehead says, not an exception to the general metaphysical principles, but their authentic exemplification, since he is the reality "X" on which all those principles defined in the *categories of explanation* are converging in any coherent actualization. From the principle of unrest, which illustrates the general creative advance of the world up to the principle of relativity, which is explaining this advance through all the parts and moments constituting the actual world, and the ontological principle, which is exhibiting this process in its permanence, the world such as it is at an instant of actualization is saved from the perishing by this permanence of God's actuality. Thus, the partition of the God into three natures should not be considered otherwise than being an exemplification of the Whitehead's difficulty to think of God as a unique and coherent being: the efficiency of God is altogether that of an origin, of an actualization and of a salvation. He is only efficient through those three moments, which the human understanding must of course distinguish, although they are converging in God on a unique activity.

3. What means the natural theology of PR: suggestions and questions.

If it is the case that Whitehead's natural theology corresponds to the Aristotle's model, those distinctions of three natures in God could be assigned to three fundamental conditions to make the world thinkable. In much the same way as Aristotle in the chapter "Lambda" of his metaphysics, Whitehead's intention is to present in PR the unavoidable conditions according to which the world is thinkable. Let us now examine those conditions.

a) The function of the Primordial Nature of God

If we consider, with Whitehead, that what does happen in the world could not be understood without the indication of a transcendent reality, on the other hand, we must tentatively evaluate the real impact of Whitehead's terminology about God. For example, could one consider the Primordial Nature of God to be just a useful device for a philosophical discussion about the process of the world, qualifying the real potentialities, taken as a whole in order to create novel actualities? If we compare Whitehead's terminology about God in SMW and in PR, we remark that the *primordial nature* in PR could be considered as another name for the *fundamental energy* as it is mentioned in SMW. In SMW, it is a representation, which gives the couple "infinite vs. finite abstractive hierarchies" of eternal objects its real coherence: once we think of those hierarchies, we could not resolve the question of their disparity without a confidence in this virtual coherence. The human finitude, which prevents from characterizing those two series by a definitive concept, appears of course to be an inescapable factor for our understanding of the concrete reality, but indicates altogether another ideal reality, which Kant called an *intellectus archetypus*, not to be

wholly reached by our human faculties, since it is only understood by our inherited intelligence, which Kant named our *intellectus ectypus*.

So, the *primordial nature of God* is referring to a transcendent reality, even if this reality is submitted, according to Whitehead, to the same and definitive metaphysical principles, in much the same way as any other actuality.

b) The Whitehead's difficulty about a philosophy of actuality (with his conception of *consequent nature of God*)

In the same way, we could consider that Whitehead's *Consequent Nature* in PR represents a conception issuing from *the Principle of Translucency of Realization* in SMW, in accordance with the *Principle of Relativity* in PR. The eternal objects that are passing to their actualization in the world remain just what they are, with their fixed relationships to each other. The *realm of eternal objects*, Whitehead says in SMW, is just an extension of the chapter on mathematics, thus becoming the *first chapter of metaphysics*^{xxii}. The *Consequent Nature* is just what this realm becomes for all *drops of actuality*, taken as a whole. But is it a power which would be able to give, for example, the actuality of the man its effectiveness when he takes his independence as a conscious individual, in spite of any absolute evil, threatening his freedom? It seems to me that Whitehead is here meeting the same perplexity as Leibniz, about its conception of *the best of possible worlds*. Of course, Whitehead clearly raises this objection in SMW, though at a more

general level ^{xxiii}: he says that God, being submitted to the same conditions as the other actual occasions, could not be considered as the author of the evil. But then, what does mean his caring about the world, so beautifully described at the end of PR? If the world is just what it is, why should God pay attention to it? Should God be the only exception to all actuality, defined by the combination of precedent potentiality and consequent actuality? If *He be conceived as the supreme ground for limitation* ^{xxiv}(ibid.), then He leaves any other actuality entirely dependent from His good willing, hence no more "atomic" in its actual presence.

It is to my eyes the fundamental reason why there cannot be any authentic philosophy of an entirely free actuality in Whitehead's cosmology. If the *Principle of Translucency of Realization* and the *Principle of Relativity* are true, any actuality is *internally determined*, even if it is *externally free*, according to the 9th categoreal obligation. If we follow Whitehead's cosmology, an actual occasion could not get rid of its datum, even when a new actuality is created. There is no such thing as an absolutely free will, which would be considered by Whitehead as a *vacuous actuality*, expressly denied in PR (among others, p.29). There is in Whitehead's cosmology no philosophy of actuality apart from a philosophy of potentiality. Hence, the human claim to absolute freedom appears to be just a dream, and the *consequent nature of God*, as defined in PR, could be the only possible result of such a situation: Even when he wants to assert himself as a self-creative entity, the human being could not get rid of its given environment, because of God's primordial sollicitation.

c) The question of Whitehead's Philosophy of History: the issue of
Superjective Nature

If every actuality depends on its datum and on the principles which are controlling its *subjectification*, what would be the meaning of a philosophy of history? I have elsewhere tentatively discussed the theory that there could be no such conception in Whitehead's philosophy^{xxv}. This theory would just be a consequence of the limitations imposed on every actuality according to God's Natures. According to the 18th category of explanation, defining the ontological principle (or *principle of efficient, and final causation*), the actuality, once it really exists as such, becomes a lure for other feelings, and so on. Hence, every actuality must be enmeshed in networks of causality to really exist itself, perish as actuality, and become finality for other actualities, according to the phase of concrescence or *satisfaction*. Thus, the ontological principle may be considered as the basic principle for the creation of becoming in the world, with the actualities being alternately causal or final entities, from a macroscopic perspective.

But could we really name this creation of becoming a "history", in the concrete and "practical" sense of this term? Human history seems to imply that the actualities that are emerging at the level of human consciousness could not be just determined by "former" datum, even if we admit that they are distinguished from it by the creativity of the emergent actuality. Hegel's conception of history is founded upon a conception of human society that is in itself expression of freedom, i.e. of pure novelty, compared to the determination of actuality in Whitehead's cosmology.

Hence, Whitehead's conception of actuality blocks any tentative to introduce a real independence in the human history. This task is once more entrusted to a transcendent actuality, whose function is to ensure a real continuity of cosmic and human becoming.

d) To sum up

The three forms by which Whitehead describes his metaphysical God are pointing to just as many difficulties as those of his cosmology. Let us remind those difficulties:

- The passage from *pure to real potentiality*, in order to create a new actuality
- The break between the datum and its *free subjectification*.
- The *historic transition* from one actuality to another, in human history.

For each of those "impasses", the appeal to the three functions of divine activity gives us an indication of the way Whitehead is envisaging that they could be overcome. Of course, as we already remarked, though doing so, Whitehead nevertheless avoids the classical handicap of treating God as a way to solve some troublesome, even insoluble questions, since God is submitted to the same principles of explanation as all other actualities. But he gives those perplexities a form which can be admitted by non-religious people as well. Then, to understand the reality means to mark the limits inside which the real structure of the world could be formulated. According to this purpose, the mention of God operates as a device to make the world really thinkable, with its areas of clearness and penumbra.

This conception of metaphysics is in reality founded upon a particular vision of the philosophizing activity. According to the definition he gives at the outset of PR and in AI as well, Whitehead's philosophical intention seems to me to propose a cosmological framework into which human activity would be thinkable, in accordance to the laws that are regulating the development of this activity. Human activity could then be considered as a particular case of a field theory: every one is altogether inserted in a general network and capable of persuasion, in the double meaning of that term: persuasion developed by persuading people on the one hand, and persuasion for people to be persuaded.

Now, I would, by the way of a conclusion, present another philosophical intention, which is also non-substantialistic, but gives this non-substantiality a different meaning, more related to personal freedom (as opposed to cosmic creativity), and to human history (as different from a mere evolution which could only be attributed to the capacity of persuasion). I am mentioning here the *Logique de la Philosophie* by Eric Weil.

D. What coherence for our lives?

What is at stake now is the genuine meaning of the coherence aimed at by philosophical activity: Is that coherence defined in cosmological terms, in order to construct a categorical scheme that makes it possible to understand every event of the world? Is it defined as a moral or ethical attitude giving every human activity its real value?

Eric Weil frankly presents his philosophical intention in this second perspective. He defines the philosophy as a (resolutely) reasonable opposition to any form of violence, by the priority he assigns to the right political action and to the personal morality which makes this action thinkable. This philosophical intention leads to some metaphysical consequences about the construction of the reality.

1. Metaphysical vs. philosophical categories

In his *Logique de la Philosophie*, Weil makes an important distinction between philosophical and metaphysical categories. As far as the first ones are concerned, he considers that they define just how the philosopher maintains in his personal life the permanence of his philosophical intention. As for metaphysical categories, their practicability resides in the fact that they can provide him with explicative schemes, about some particular domains of knowledge, in order that he could keep this philosophical intention in coherence with his natural and human environment. Now, the philosophical intention of Weil is distinct from that of Whitehead by the fact that for him the philosopher can not limit himself to the comprehension of the world, but he is also aiming at the coherence of the whole human society, by the way of this very comprehension and of its (educative) participation to the politic life.

Clearly enough, this intention leads to some consequences about the conception of the human life and human activities: Weil's metaphysics define the historical, social, political, ethical conditions

to which every one (and the philosopher as well) must freely accept to submit himself, if he wants to be a coherent individual in a coherent society. For in Weil's view, one could hardly access to the coherence of a concept of nature without taking into account the human freedom, which altogether pertains as such to the nature and nevertheless produces a reality of its own, clearly differentiated from any "natural" actuality. On the other hand, in whiteheadian terminology, the human freedom could only be defined as the only (objective) "defining characteristic" of human society of occasions, and of individuals as well. Hence, we should invert for Whitehead the Weil's conception: For him, one could hardly find the coherence of human politics without integrating it into the general coherence of the whole nature.

2. Philosophy in the making

Nevertheless, different as they are, those philosophical intentions are converging on some major trends. We discover in both cases that the primacy is assigned to the action over the substantial realities, such as individuals, or communities, or even states. It is that reality of human freedom, which is the guiding thread of human condition, since one could not find sense for any coherent action without this presupposition, as it appears with Whitehead's conception of *persuasion* in AI, or Weil's theory of the refusal of violence.

Both are keeping this guiding thread of freedom to make their action a sense making one. On the other hand, each of them uses some historical categories, differently at each philosophical period,

according to the *situation* in which the philosopher is living. Thus, on this particular point, Weil's conception of action could be compared with that of Whitehead. For both, the supremacy of action over pure theoretical activity is absolute, as a way to the essential reality, even if the philosophical intentions are different. This supremacy given to the human action could be assigned to a common definition of its essential elements:

- The importance of the rational activity, in order to become more and more aware of the constitutive elements of coherence in the world and/or society;
- The embodiment of this rationality into a living body (cf. in PR the distinction between the presentational immediacy, describable by any language and its origin in the causal efficacy of the body, cf. also the important distinction in Weil's philosophy between *vie* and *vue*, between life and view).

Nevertheless, one important difference is that the conception of the action to be realized according to Weil could not be considered as guided by divine persuasion, as in the conception presented in AI. For Weil, the individual could not find his personal coherence without integrating social values into his own perspectives. The difference here resides on the role of history for the conception and the development of this action: Whitehead is reluctant to consider human action as being first "historical" in itself, whereas it is for Weil an essential condition for social and moral activity. For sure, Whitehead would admit this vision, but he could not help to appeal to the Eros, or God's Primordial Nature, when giving his interpretation of the human activity.

3. The refusal of the category of *substance*, as a metaphysical category, historically marked

For both, of course, the non-substantialistic turn has prevailed and re-shapes the philosophical attitude in the sense of a political or ethical or personal engagement, whose meaning must always be renewed, according to the general evolution of history. So it seems to me that those two "non-substantialistic" philosophers are converging on a "subjectification" which is very useful for our times. They together allow some new approach of every day's effective life, without falling into the fallacy of *misplaced concreteness*.

But, the **interpretation** of this refusal of the substantialistic view is all different: Whitehead, particularly in SMW sees it as a consequence of the evolution of scientific conceptions, during the last decades of the 19th century and the first of the 20th. For sure, Whitehead is going further, with the philosophy of organism. He sees in this refusal the key-concept justifying his *reformed subjectivist principle*, since it is not before the introduction of a really subjective actuality in PR that he can really solve the question of the classical substantialism.

Nevertheless, his criticism of Kant about the concept of substance seems to be somewhat unjustified: Kant also criticized the classical concept of substance, and saw it as a production of the human understanding. Hegel followed him on that way, though in a somewhat different

meaning, which is of course peculiar to him: He considered that the "substance" was not the final mark of the reality, since he conceived it as a transient process to the subjective activity:

Although the substance is "the immediate presupposition" of the concept, it is not in the mode of a fixed reality, through and through homogeneous, and so to speak static: it is movement, process, becoming, transition from the personal self to the "other" self, this "otherness" being here precisely what we could name the emergence of substance as concept, that is to say subject^{xxvi}.

Thus, oppositely to Whitehead, Weil would interpret Kant and/or Hegel in the sense of a fundamental refusal, since both are rejecting the static substance and give their preference to a reasonable subjective aiming at coherent human life. Hence, according to Weil, Kant and Hegel are opposed to the sole interest in particular and static realities, falsely defined as "permanent" by the human understanding (= all things that we are considering all along our lives as unchanging entities).

Nevertheless, it seems to me that the more fundamental point of disagreement between Weil and Whitehead would have been that of their respective conception of the human freedom in its relation to the philosophical activity.

4. The topic of freedom: the central point of divergence between Weil and Whitehead.

On the topic of the freedom, Whitehead's novel conception of reality leads of course to a fecund discovery: the ultimate is pure creativity, which is often hidden by the daily use of language. But Weil's conception of the human freedom goes beyond that discovery of the role of creativity, since

he gives it an absolute and invaluable meaning: In Weil's view, freedom as ultimate reality plays nearly the same role as God's nature in process-philosophy: what is attributed to God throughout his whole work (among others: Principles of Unrest, of Concretion and of Ultimate Satisfaction), is transferred to human freedom in Weil's conception of moral and political philosophy.

5. What consequences for a *field theory* of human action?

So, it seems to me that Weil's conception of political action throws a new light on the Whitehead's philosophy of actuality. Of course, we could simply interpret the philosophy of organism with the resources of physics, in terms of a field theory, since any actual occasion is a new leap from multiple and diffused factors to a novel unity^{xxvii}. The *concrecence* by which this actuality is becoming a subjective aim for its own sake makes this new actuality effective for other actualizations. The Whitehead's conception of God illustrates this *transition* from data to their ever-renewed actualities, and from those actualities to new data prehended by novel actualizations.

But in his *Logique de la Philosophie*, Weil is going further: he considers that in political or ethical action, the reference to human freedom makes this leap of potentials to their realization quite unsatisfactory, from a philosophical point of view. Of course, this leap expresses a "free reality", which is affirming itself as entirely different from any interweaving of causes and effects which has determined it, according to the 9th categoreal obligation. But in the case of human beings, this "free reality" is antecedent, not subsequent, to any temporal interweaving of causes and effects: it

expresses an independence of the conceptual life that Whitehead should only attribute to God's Primordial Nature. By doing so, Weil reveals the last meaning of Whitehead's theory of God, as the invaluable meaning that human beings are able to impose to any particular field, particularly in the domains of ethics and politics.

Notes

ⁱ A.N.Whitehead : *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge At the University Press, 1933), 244.

ⁱⁱ Whitehead, 244

ⁱⁱⁱ Whitehead, 244.

^{iv} Whitehead, 354-355: *The static notion, here rejected, is derived by two different paths from ancient thought. Plato in the earlier period of his thought, deceived by the beauty of mathematics intelligible in unchanging perfection, conceived of a super-world of ideas, forever perfect and forever interwoven. (...) Aristotle introduced the static fallacy by another concept which has infected all subsequent philosophy. He conceived of primary substances as the static foundations which received the impress of qualification.*

^v Whitehead mainly discusses this topic in PR, Part IV, with his theory of *The Extensive Continuum*.

^{vi} I think it is the reason why, according to D.Hurtubise analysis, this conception was antecedent to the classical one, in Whitehead's Cosmology (cf. D.Hurtubise : *Relire Whitehead – Les Concepts de Dieu dans Process and Reality*, specially pp. 102-104, about the *initial conception of God* in Whitehead's *Process and Reality*)..

^{vii} Whitehead, 245.

^{viii} Whitehead, 245

^{ix} Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, 1953, 195-196.

^x In either cases, Whitehead is adopting the exact opposite attitude to that of Aristotle: for him, the concrete basis is process and the abstraction is the production of substantialist concepts, where as the substance is the concrete reference for the process of qualifying that substance, in Aristotle's logic.

^{xi} Whitehead, 211.

^{xii} Whitehead, 213.

^{xiii} Whitehead mentions this principle at the end of his chapter *Abstraction* in SMW, just before the chapter *God*, precisely considered as the actualization of this principle.

^{xiv} Whitehead, 218.

^{xv} Whitehead, 193-194

^{xvi} Whitehead, 223.

^{xvii} Whitehead, 132. This notion is explicitly resumed in the chapter *God* (SMW, 219), where it is related to the concept of *abruptness*.

^{xviii} Whitehead, 132.

^{xix} Whitehead, 132.

^{xx} Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, The Free Press, 1979, 24.

^{xxi} Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 140.

^{xxii} Whitehead, 214.

^{xxiii} Whitehead, 222-223.

^{xxiv} Whitehead, 222-223.

^{xxv} J.M.Breuvart: *Y-a-t-il une philosophie de l'histoire dans Aventures d'Idées*, in I.Stengers et alii: *L'Effet Whitehead* (Vrin, 1994), 129 & svtes.

^{xxvi} G.Jarczyk: *Système et Liberté dans la Logique de Hegel* (Aubier, 1980), 176 (=translation mine).

^{xxvii} Cf. in SMW 186-187, the discussion about *the private psychological field*, related to *physiology and physics*.