

Whitehead's Adventurous Religion as his Theological Legacy¹

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The topic of Alfred North Whitehead's importance for contemporary theology is subtly ambiguous. It might refer to the influence of Whitehead's work on contemporary theology, calling for a survey of recent work in theology and how it has or has not been affected by Whitehead's philosophy. On the other hand, it suggests an inquiry concerning what theologians might still learn from Whitehead. Perhaps theologians, or some theologians at any rate, have not taken Whitehead seriously enough. (It's hard to imagine that this could occur at Claremont School of Theology while the two greatest living representatives of process thought are still among us.) Or perhaps there are as yet untapped resources for theological reflection in Whitehead's philosophy. Even a superficial look at recent theology demonstrates Whitehead's continuing relevance to the field; moreover, Whiteheadian scholars continue to expand Whitehead's thinking into areas that Whitehead did not explore such as feminism, ecology, and economic theory. My approach is to combine a bit of both of these alternatives. I will begin, however, with some observations about the little we know about Whitehead's own religious development, for I see in this story a lesson for theology. In other words, part of Whitehead's importance for contemporary theology is Whitehead's own struggle with religious questions. Next, I will make some comments on the fact that Whitehead's influence has been disproportionately theological. Finally, I turn to what I consider

¹ This paper, originally titled "Whitehead's Importance to Contemporary Theology," was presented at Claremont School of Theology, March 11, 2005. This is the first in a series of two papers. The second paper, "God as the Most and Best Moved Mover: Hartshorne's Importance for Philosophical Theology," is scheduled to appear in the Spring 2006 number of *The Midwest Quarterly*.

Whitehead's abiding relevance to theological reflection, to wit, his spirit of adventure about religion that seeks ever wider and more comprehensive perspectives upon, but from within, the creative advance of the world.

Anyone endeavoring to study Whitehead's religious development, much less his life, is seriously handicapped by his own privacy and by what Victor Lowe calls Whitehead's lack of interest in himself. For example, he kept no diary. Lowe reports that Whitehead began an attempt to extend the fourteen pages of "Autobiographical Notes," written for the third volume of Paul Schilpp's *Library of Living Philosophers*, but he lost interest (Lowe 1990, 189). Not surprisingly, these few pages provide almost no insight into Whitehead's inner struggles with religion (Whitehead 1941). One learns that he studied Latin and Greek, reading various classics including the Septuagint and the New Testament. Whitehead tells of his clergyman father, but he does not mention his mother or his three older siblings. The cruelest blow, as far as a biographer is concerned, is that Evelyn Whitehead followed the directives of her husband's will by destroying his letters to her as well as his unpublished drafts and writings (Lowe 1985, 7). Lowe wryly comments, "The attempt to write a life of Whitehead is something one should not wish on one's worst enemy" (Lowe 1982, 137). We can be grateful that Lowe had enough respect for Whitehead to believe that his life story was worth investigating despite the lack of materials ordinarily available to biographers.

Thanks to Lowe's research we catch more informative glimpses of Whitehead's religious development. Although Whitehead was raised Anglican, he made an intensive study of Catholicism under the influence of John Henry Newman, and it is likely that he read some of his works. Shortly before Newman's death, Whitehead traveled to the

Oratory at Edgbaston, near Birmingham, and gained a brief audience with Newman. Lowe thinks the meeting occurred in the early summer of 1890 (Newman died August 11, 1890). Nothing is recorded of that day in Whitehead's life, although as Lowe remarks, "He never forgot his few minutes with Newman" (Lowe 1985, 171). Whitehead is reported to have said of his impression of Newman, "He was wonderful," but as Newman was deaf and nearly blind, it is likely that the force of Newman's personality rather than an exchange of ideas is what made for the lasting impression.

During his days at Cambridge, especially from 1884 to 1888, Whitehead was a member of "the Apostles" (officially called the Cambridge Conversazione Society). Every Saturday evening the group would meet for open and frank discussion and debate of various issues. On one occasion in 1886 the question was raised, "Should Churchmen go to Rome?" Whitehead's answer was, "Yes, or in the other direction" (Lowe 1985, 141). Lowe interprets Whitehead's answer to mean that Churchmen, that is to say, members of the Anglican church or its clergy, should either become Catholic or abandon religious belief altogether. Whitehead's meeting with Newman shows that he was tempted by the first option. In 1887 the Apostles raised the question whether a personal God is a satisfactory explanation of the universe. Whitehead answered yes (Lowe 1982, 140). It is clear, however, that in 1897 or '98 he definitely went "in the other direction" by deciding against Catholicism and selling his theological books (Lowe 1985, 190).

Lowe suggests that one factor in Whitehead's turn to an agnostic frame of mind was his sensitivity to the collapse of the Newtonian synthesis in science (Lowe 1985, 188). Lucien Price reports Whitehead as saying:

By 1900 the Newtonian physics were demolished, done for! Still speaking personally, it had a profound effect on me; I have been fooled once, and I'll be damned if I'll be fooled again! Einstein is supposed to have made an epochal discovery. I am respectful and interested, but also skeptical. There is no more reason to suppose that Einstein's relativity is anything final, than Newton's *Principia*. The danger is dogmatic thought; it plays the devil with religion, and science is not immune from it (Price 1954, 345-346; Dialogue XLII, September 11, 1945).

This quote makes clear that Whitehead was opposed to dogmatism in either science or religion. But if one could not look to science as an authority, how much less can religion supply the needed epistemological anchor?

There were also problems intrinsic to religion itself, and specifically to Catholicism, that disturbed Whitehead. Lowe reports that the doctrine of papal infallibility was a stumbling block for him (Lowe 1985, 185). More troubling was the traditional concept of divine power and the problem of evil that it generates. According to Lowe, a main reason that Whitehead rejected both Canterbury and Rome was "his dislike of the doctrine of Almighty Power which they both maintained" (Lowe 1990, 187).

Whitehead's disapproval of traditional ideas of omnipotence is evident in his writings. He understands the image of God as an arbitrary tyrant to go hand-in-hand with building religion on fear. In *Science and the Modern World* he writes, "The presentation of God under the aspect of power awakens every modern instinct of critical reaction" (Whitehead 1925, 274). Whitehead's own "modern instinct of critical reaction" is evident a year later in *Religion in the Making*:

The worship of glory arising from power is not only dangerous: it arises from a barbaric conception of God. I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the bones of those slaughtered because of men intoxicated by its attraction (Whitehead 1996, 55).

No wonder, then, that in 1929, in *Process and Reality*, he referred to the idolatry of fashioning God in the image of imperial rulers (Whitehead 1978, 342).

Given Whitehead's criticisms of traditional religion, what led him to rethink his ideas about God? Lowe remarks on the effects of the carnage of the First World War: "Whitehead's heart was desolated by the casualty lists" (Lowe 1982, 143). The psychological blow of the death of his youngest son Eric, who came to fighting age as the war neared its end, may have been the greatest contributing factor to Whitehead's turn to religion. Whitehead's two other children, North and Jessie, as well as his friend, Bertrand Russell, indicated that Whitehead's changing religious views had their source in this tragic event (Lowe 1990, 188). Jessie made special note of the effect that Eric's death had upon Evelyn and how this also affected her husband. An echo of the father's pain sounds in Whitehead's dedication to *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919): "To Eric Alfred Whitehead, Royal Flying Corps, November 27, 1898 to March 13, 1918, Killed in action over the Forêt de Gobain giving himself that the city of his vision may not perish. The music of his life was without discord, perfect in its beauty." Russell maintained that Eric's death made Whitehead want to believe in immortality (Lowe 1990, 188). According to this interpretation, Whitehead's search for God was the endeavor to discern some glimmer of meaning in Eric's death, to salvage him from the wreckage.

Whatever the reasons may be, Whitehead had clearly become a theist by 1925. Thanks in large measure to the work of Lewis Ford (1984 and 2000), it is now widely known that Whitehead was constantly reworking his idea of God, most intensely in the years between 1925 and 1929, but also up until at least 1933. *Science and the Modern World*, the published version of Whitehead's first Lowell lectures—delivered early in February 1925—includes a chapter titled “God” that was not part of the original lectures. In that chapter, Whitehead argues that the appearance of new actualities presupposes “an antecedent limitation among values, introducing contraries, grades, and oppositions” (Whitehead 1925, 256). He identifies this “principle of limitation” with God. Interestingly, Whitehead maintains that, “God is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality” (Whitehead 1925, 257). The problem, however, is that a *principle* limits nothing; only an *actuality* can play this role. Within a year, in February 1926—in the lectures published as *Religion in the Making*—Whitehead referred to God as “an actual but non-temporal entity” (Whitehead 1996, 90, 94). With the publication of *Process and Reality* in 1929, Whitehead speaks of God as the one non-temporal actual entity that customizes the domain of eternal objects for each emergent occasion (Whitehead 1978, 31, 46). The repository of all possibilities is called the Primordial Nature of God. Since the God of *Religion in the Making* and *Process and Reality* is an actual entity, it acts and is acted upon by the world of temporal occasions. The reception of all achieved value in the temporal world into the divine life is called the Consequent Nature of God. In *Adventures of Ideas*, published in 1933, Whitehead hints at yet another modification. He speaks of the “everlasting nature of God, which in a sense is non-temporal and in another temporal . . .” (Whitehead 1933, 267; chapter XIII, section VI).

Whitehead did not consider himself a theologian, and he had little truck with organized religion. Nevertheless, because of the theistic strain of his writings during the American period that I have just summarized, his influence in theology became considerable.² At the University of Chicago, initially with the impetus provided by Henry Nelson Wieman in 1926, the study of Whitehead became central. The arrival of Charles Hartshorne at Chicago in 1928 assured Whitehead's importance for theology for the next twenty-five years. Hartshorne was a member of the Department of Philosophy, but in his final years at Chicago (1947-1955) he held a joint appointment in Philosophy and at the Meadville/Lombard Theological School. Besides Wieman and Hartshorne, the names of those who taught at Chicago (Daniel Day Williams, Bernard Loomer, Bernard Meland) and who graduated from there (William L. Reese, John B. Cobb, Jr., Schubert Ogden, and Eugene Peters) form a substantial part of the core of Who's Who in process theology, at least for its first two generations. In 1985 Victor Lowe remarked that "theology is now the main area of [Whitehead's] influence" (Lowe 1985, 5). Four years later, George R. Lucas, Jr. called for a "rehabilitation of Whitehead" (Lucas 1989). The sense of this phrase is to more systematically explore Whitehead's relevance for mainstream philosophy; this requires, among other things, rescuing Whitehead from his theological interpreters. Cobb acknowledged the importance of Lucas' project while expressing the wish that the point could be made less harshly (Cobb 1990, 279). A couple of years later, Cobb made a similar comment in connection with the reception of Hartshorne's work:

² The majority of what Whitehead wrote has nothing to do explicitly with the subject. I recall my graduate student days when I told the chair of the philosophy department that I had chosen as the special topic for one of my doctoral exams the philosophy of Whitehead. Knowing that my interests were in the philosophy of religion, the chair asked me, "Does that include the three volumes of *Principia Mathematica*?" Of course, I had no desire to be tested over that. (Since those days I have acquired some interest in formal logic—and some appreciation for its elegance—but in 1982 I would have been a miserable failure in a doctoral exam on the *Principia*.)

“One mark of our time is that a philosopher who wins a following among theologians is handicapped among philosophers” (Cobb 1992, 83).

Whitehead seems clearly to have been most influential on the side of theology much to the regret of those who would claim him for the philosophers. Nevertheless, a few of us whose primary education was in philosophy see things differently. Whitehead is refreshing precisely because he was a philosopher who strove for a comprehensive vision that would not dismiss religion out of hand. When so many of Whitehead’s contemporaries dismissed religion as outmoded science, linguistic confusion, or mere wish fulfillment, he called it (along with science) a permanent element of human nature (Whitehead 1925, 260). This view of religion requires, in Whitehead’s words, disengaging the spiritual message of religion “from associations of a particular imagery” (Whitehead 1925, 271)—and, we may add, particular creeds and doctrinal formulations.

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest (Whitehead 1925, 275).

If some philosophers distance themselves from Whitehead because he is attractive to theologians, one must ask if the problem is in Whitehead or in those philosophers. At the very least, they exhibit a narrowness of understanding that was inimical to Whitehead’s

thoughts about philosophy. “Philosophy may not neglect the multifariousness of the world—the fairies dance, and Christ is nailed to the cross” (Whitehead 1978, 338).

Not all dismissals of religion are opposed to its finer elements. It is possible to take an attitude of appreciation for religion’s contributions to moral philosophy and even to metaphysics. According to this view, after the critics of religion have finished their job, something of importance to human flourishing can be salvaged from the wreckage. The deistic philosophers are the best example of this approach. The trappings of religion—its rituals, organizations, Scriptures, clerical orders, and dogmas—mask its true meaning, namely, its role as a guide to conduct. The deists also retained a metaphysical component in the design argument for God’s existence. More sophisticated, but in its own way no less dismissive, is the Hegelian approach that regards religion as expressing in mythological imagery what would later come to be expressed more explicitly and clearly in the categories of a philosophical system.

Whitehead rejected the translation of religious concepts into ethical categories. He wrote that the insistence on rules of conduct “marks the ebb of religious fervour” (Whitehead 1925, 275). In a word: “Conduct is a by-product of religion—an inevitable by-product, but not the main point” (Whitehead 1925, 274). When he formulated his own thinking about God, he focused on what he called the brief Galilean vision that flickered uncertainly through the ages. “Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals” (Whitehead 1978, 343). If Whitehead would not reduce religion to ethics, neither did he subsume it to metaphysics. It is true that he maintained that “religion requires a metaphysical backing” (Whitehead 1996, 83). By this, however, he means that religion cannot dispense with reason without losing its claim to universality

and objectivity. As he says, “Reason is the safeguard of the objectivity of religion: it secures for it the general coherence denied to hysteria” (Whitehead 1996, 64). The necessity of metaphysical speculation, however, is not the same as the sufficiency of particular metaphysical proposals—these are always provisional and subject to revision. Whitehead says, “The defect of a metaphysical system is the very fact that it is a neat little system of thought, which thereby over-simplifies its expression of the world” (Whitehead 1996, 50). For this reason, the complaint sometimes heard that process theologians put their identity as Whiteheadians before their identity as Christians—whatever truth it may have for a particular theologian or for a particular remark by a theologian—is contrary to the spirit of Whitehead’s own remarks.

Whitehead’s theism has been challenged from without and from within. From without, some have argued that Whitehead’s God is religiously deficient, that it is not a deity worthy of worship or loyalty. An early example of this kind of critique is Stephen L. Ely’s *The Religious Availability of Whitehead’s God* (1942). Edward Madden and Peter Hare originally referred to process theism as “quasi-theism” to indicate their view that it isn’t fully theistic in the way classical theism is (Madden and Hare 1968: 115-125). Antony Flew justified confining his critiques to classical theism by suggesting that process theism is a somewhat esoteric doctrine (Flew 1985, 111). An interesting critique from someone sympathetic to Whitehead’s cosmology comes from Robert Neville. He accepts Whitehead’s defense of speculative philosophy and his analysis of the temporal world but believes that the world requires grounding in a transcendent reality that creates it *ex nihilo* (Neville 1980).

Critiques from within are also common. Lewis Ford says that Whitehead was surprised to find that God, or something like God, was needed to complete the metaphysical system he was laboring to articulate in the mid to late 1920s. But perhaps Whitehead's judgment was premature. Some of those sympathetic to Whitehead's metaphysical project maintain that God is either inconsistent with or unnecessary to Whitehead's own system. The *locus classicus* for this view is Donald Sherburne's "Whitehead Without God," first published in 1967 and revised four years later (see Sherburne 1971). Donald A. Crosby (2002) and Frederick Ferré (2001, chapter 6) are two more examples of Whiteheadian non-theists. Others inspired by Whitehead, having seen the problems with his particular form of theism, have developed alternate forms of process theism. Charles Hartshorne (1991, 642-645), John B. Cobb, Jr. (1965), Lewis S. Ford (2000), David Ray Griffin (2001), and Rem B. Edwards (2001) are important in this connection.³

Before I knew anything of Whitehead or of process theology, I was reading, at my father's suggestion, the sermons of the great modernist preacher and scholar, Harry Emerson Fosdick. My favorite book, or my favorite of all of the titles of Fosdick's books, was *Adventurous Religion*. It was a refreshing idea that Fosdick proposed that intellectual growth, curiosity, and vigorous doubt are vital aspects of faith. One need not become irreligious or impious simply by virtue of holding nontraditional views about religion and its dogmas. I would later encounter these ideas in Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith* and in the evolutionary philosophy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Flannery O'Connor was most eloquent in her advice to Alfred Corn, who wrote to her concerning his religious doubts.

³ I have summarized in more detail these various revisions of process theism (Viney 2004). In addition, I have offered a critique of Ferré's process non-theism in a forthcoming article (Viney 2005).

She suggested that he cultivate a Christian skepticism so as to be “free to be formed by something larger than your intellect or the intellects of those around you” (O’Connor 1979, 476-78). When Donald Crosby introduced me to Whitehead’s writings, I felt again the thrill of adventurous religion. Whitehead says, “Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science” (Whitehead 1925, 270).

Whitehead’s personal struggles and his philosophical reflections upon religious ideas, especially the idea of God, exemplify this spirit of adventure. In my view, this is his greatest importance to contemporary and to future theology. It is interesting that the one time that Teilhard cites Whitehead in his writings concerns this dimension of Whitehead’s thought. In 1951 he wrote to his friend Pierre Leroy, “But above all, hold high the spirit of adventure and of conquest, as Whitehead says . . .” (Teilhard 1980, 52).⁴ The necessity of an adventurous spirit is most clear in the relation of science and religion. Science rarely comes free of metaphysical assumptions, and it is primarily these assumptions that bring these two human endeavors into conflict. Both Whitehead and Teilhard understood this. They argued that religious concepts must often be rethought or reinterpreted in light of scientific progress and what this means at the level of metaphysics. For Teilhard, the central scientific discovery of our age with which theology must deal is the fact of evolution. Whitehead was clearly an evolutionist, but his concern, as we have already seen, was the collapse of the Newtonian world-view. In *Science and the Modern World* we find Whitehead rethinking the metaphysical assumptions of modern science in light of a process-relational world-view. In place of the doctrine of

⁴ Teilhard may have had in mind Whitehead’s statement, “The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure” (Whitehead 1925, 276). To my knowledge, Teilhard mentions Whitehead only one other time. In a 1937 letter to Lucile Swan he indicates having read *Religion in the Making* and he adds that it was “Full of interesting statements” (Teilhard and Swan, 82).

“simply located” particles of inert matter, he advocated a doctrine of “prehensive” relations by virtue of which actual entities are internally related to their past actual world. In place of the doctrine of “vacuous actuality,” he promoted the doctrine of *actual* entities, that is, entities whose very being is to actively synthesize the data derived from the immediate past into a novel whole. In Whitehead’s pithy phrase, “The many become one and are increased by one” (Whitehead 1978, 21).⁵

It was only within the context of a rethinking of the most general categories of existence, which Whitehead considered to be the task of speculative philosophy, that he began to approach the question of God. Yet, Whitehead’s strategies are not those of an ordinary philosopher. He never seeks proofs for God’s existence. One of the problems he mentions in connection with believing in a transcendent deity is “to get itself proved” (Whitehead 1996, 70). For all of my own interest in theistic proofs and disproofs, I always had the vague sense that I had lost sight of something that was important. Of course, many philosophers have felt themselves up to the task of proving or disproving God’s existence. Even Hartshorne incautiously spoke of “proofs” for God’s existence, although he eventually abandoned that conceit in favor of an approach that recognizes the multi-layered structure of theistic belief, the nature of deductive logic, and the many nuances of human rationality and judgment (Viney 1985, viii). The question that most preoccupied Hartshorne and that places him at his closest contact with Whitehead is, “What is God like, supposing there is a God?” As Whitehead says, “Today there is but one religious dogma in debate: What do you mean by ‘God’?” (Whitehead 1996, 67).

⁵ I have demonstrated in an as yet unpublished paper (“Teilhard and Process Philosophy Redux”) that Teilhard’s own critique of science parallels that of Whitehead and that his alternative, which he called a “metaphysics of creative union” or a “metaphysics of creative transformation” is a version of process metaphysics.

The danger of beginning with the question, “Do you believe in God?” rather than “What do you mean by ‘God’?” is well illustrated in a story that Hartshorne tells about Arthur Lovejoy.

He was proposed for some community responsibility, and a political committee, interviewing him to assess his fitness for the office, asked him if he believed in God. One must know Lovejoy to take his reply in the right way. It was to the effect that, so far as he knew, a number (I think nine) of different meanings had been assigned to the word God. He proceeded to explicate these meanings. I don’t know if he ever got to the point of endorsing one of the conceptions, or rejecting them all, or declaring his inability to decide. He was given the responsibility (Hartshorne 1990, 320).

A host of questions are begged by leaping impatiently to the question of whether God exists and not taking care to map, whether conceptually or historically, the varieties of theism. Hartshorne was particularly interested in this sort of mapping (Viney 1998), but Whitehead pioneered the way for him. He distinguishes three concepts of God: God as an imperial ruler, God as the personification of moral energy, and God in the image of an ultimate philosophical principle. After having told the reader that Hume’s critique of these three concepts is unanswerable, Whitehead says, “What follows is merely an attempt to add another speaker to that masterpiece, Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*” (Whitehead 1978, 343).

For this reason Whitehead says of his treatment of God in *Process and Reality*, “There is nothing here in the nature of proof [concerning the nature of God]. There is merely the confrontation of the theoretic system with a certain rendering of the facts”

(Whitehead 1978, 343). Whitehead takes God seriously *as a philosophical problem*, by adding to the dialogue—not just Hume’s, but the one that occurs in the history of thought—a genuinely new way of thinking about God. We have noted that not everyone thinks that his philosophical theism is successful. I view this as secondary since the system itself is unfinished and Whitehead never claimed anything but a provisional status for it. “In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (Whitehead 1978, xiv). He says in *Religion in the Making* that he is attempting to apprehend “character permanently inherent in the nature of things” analogous to the way that one apprehends the character of one’s friends (Whitehead 1996, 67).

A good example of the practical difference Whitehead’s approach makes to the treatment of the theistic question is in the problem of evil. Simply stated, the problem of evil comes to this: if God is all-powerful, then God has the ability to prevent unjustified suffering. If God is perfectly good, then God has the motive to prevent unjustified suffering. But unjustified suffering apparently exists; therefore, there is reason to believe that God is not all-powerful or not perfectly good. The argument can be taken in at least two ways. According to a more traditional interpretation, the problem of evil poses a challenge to belief in God. In other words, it is a stepping stone towards atheism. Another interpretation is that it is a challenge to rethink the attributes of God. In this case, if one considers the argument sound, it is not belief in God that one should abandon but belief in certain concepts of God. Whitehead, and his fellow process theists, generally approach the problem of evil in the spirit of the second interpretation. To assume the first interpretation—that the problem of evil is an argument against the existence of God—is

an invitation to beg the question against alternative proposals about the nature of God such as Whitehead offers.

Whitehead's own conclusions will not be agreeable to all, especially as they conflict with conceptions closer to classical theism. For example, Whitehead denies that an individual's free decisions can be totally determined by another. This is what is behind the slogan—often found in discussions of process theism—that *God acts by persuasion rather than by coercion*. Whitehead attributes this idea to Plato's later thought, in the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*, and calls it, "one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion" (Whitehead 1933, 213; ch. X, sec. III). Unfortunately, the slogan has often been misinterpreted, even by process thinkers. It does not mean that God acts only as a final cause and never as an efficient cause, as Griffin has shown (Griffin 1991, 98-99). "Coercion," in the sense intended by the slogan, is the ability of one actual being to unilaterally bring about the decision of another actual being. In Whitehead's metaphysics, no individual possesses this ability. Thus, in a metaphysical sense, it is not only God that acts persuasively and not coercively, but every actual being.

If the classical doctrine of omnipotence is important to you, then you will probably remain dissatisfied with Whitehead's view. That is fine, but give Whitehead credit for expressing equally profound sensibilities. He teaches us that it is okay to explore other meanings of the word "God." He teaches us not to be bullied by orthodoxy, whether it is religious or philosophical. We may finally discover ourselves at an impasse—an "impasse on competing descriptions of God," as James Ross says—but that too is okay. "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster—it is an opportunity" (Whitehead 1925, 266). The classical theist attributes to God the power to right every wrong, prevent

every injustice, and heal every wound. The classical theist is then left with the anomaly of why God does not use this power or uses it in ways we find utterly baffling and morally arbitrary. Whitehead's metaphysical scheme entails that no being, not even God, can have this kind of power, but for that reason Whitehead's God can be unambiguously good. I can see no good reason, for restricting the word "God" only to the former doctrine.

If Whitehead was indeed looking for a way of bringing meaning from Eric's death, he found it in the doctrine of objective immortality. Whitehead did not rule out the possibility of a continuation of an individual's consciousness after death, but the immortality he developed in *Process and Reality* is not that. It is, rather, to find a place in the everlasting memory of God.

This immortality of the World of Action, derived from its transformation in God's nature is beyond our imagination to conceive. The various attempts at description are often shocking and profane. What does haunt our imagination is that the immediate facts of present action pass into permanent significance for the Universe. The insistent notion of Right and Wrong, Achievement and Failure, depends upon this background. Otherwise every activity is merely a passing whiff of insignificance (Whitehead 1968, 94).

According to this view, the music of Eric's life, which Whitehead described as "without discord, perfect in its beauty," became another counterpoint in the symphony of the divine memory.

Again, it is possible to be dissatisfied with this form of immortality. Process thinkers like Lewis S. Ford and Marjorie Suchocki (Ford and Suchocki, 1977; Suchocki

1992), Jan Van der Veken (Van der Veken 1986), Randy Auxier (Auxier 1998), David Griffin (Griffin 2001, 236-246), and Santiago Sia (Sia 2004, 83-99) have suggested ways of thinking about a more personal afterlife, one in which God is aware of us and we are aware of God, perhaps more fully than we have been in this life. If some of us remain skeptical of these “posthumous careers,” as Hartshorne calls them, it is no damage to Whitehead or to his doctrine of objective immortality. The much ignored psychologist-psychiatrist, Andras Angyal—wise beyond his tragically short life—said that we live most fully when we live in the fond regard of others. As Angyal says, “To be is to mean something to someone else. This existence we cannot directly create for ourselves; it can only be given to us by another” (Angyal 1973, 18). In Whitehead’s metaphysics, the ultimate other who gives us this gift of meaning something to someone else is God.

If the Whiteheadian nontheists are right, or if atheism generally is the deep truth of things, there remains the search and the questions that demand real answers for real life; the merely negative atheism of an Antony Flew (at least in his earlier writings) seems to me lacking in practical value. But how can we do justice by means of our rational natures to the feeling that led Whitehead to the doctrine of objective immortality in the first place? These feelings are beautifully expressed in Adalaide Proctor’s (1825-1864) poem, “A Lost Chord,” set to music by the great Arthur Sullivan (Proctor 1858, 119).

A Lost Chord

Seated one day at the Organ,
 I was weary and ill at ease,
 And my fingers wandered idly
 Over the noisy keys.

I do not know what I was playing,
 Or what I was dreaming then;
 But I struck one chord of music,
 Like the sound of a great Amen.

It flooded the crimson twilight,
 Like the close of an Angel's Psalm
 And it lay on my fevered spirit
 With a touch of infinite calm.

It quieted pain and sorrow.
 Like love overcoming strife;
 It seemed the harmonious echo
 From our discordant life.

It linked all perplexèd meanings
 Into one perfect peace,
 And trembled away into silence
 As if it were loath to cease.

I have sought, but I seek it vainly,
 That one lost chord divine,
 Which came from the soul of the Organ
 And entered into mine.

It may be that Death's bright angel
 Will speak in that chord again,
 It may be that only in heaven
 I shall hear that great Amen.

It is not insignificant that Sullivan composed the music for this poem upon the death of his brother. Whitehead can give expression to the importance of the loveliness of the poem and of Sullivan's music, born of sorrow: "Every event on its finer side introduces God into the world" (Whitehead 1996, 155-156).

Whitehead's adventurous religion is a unique interweaving of creative appropriation of elements of theology, speculative audacity, and epistemic humility.

When the critics have done their best, when the weak supports have been repaired, when the unstable factors of his metaphysics have given way to collapse, when the historians of philosophy and theology have cubbyholed Whitehead and Whiteheadians—when all of this is accomplished—I hope that we continue to hold high the spirit of adventure in theology, Whitehead’s legacy for us.

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