

LECTURE AT SHANGDONG NORMAL UNIVERSITY TO INAGURATE ITS CENTER FOR PROCESS PSYCHOLOGY

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I am excited and honored to be participating in the Adventure being inaugurated today at Shangdong Normal University: the new center for process psychology. It is an honor of which I am undeserving, therefore one that I appreciate all the more. Let me apologize immediately for my lack of language skills, which means I will be speaking to you today in English. I hope the translation provided will be of help. I will try to make my talk easy to follow by reading directly from the prepared text.

I first want to express my profound admiration for the people responsible for this marvelous new center, namely the scholars and officials at Shangdong Normal University, who have demonstrated their bold resolve to explore new modes of thought in psychology. Hopefully, these ideas will provide new possibilities that will help to confront the problems and issues facing our imperiled world. It is truly remarkable that the first university center for process psychology should be founded in a country so recently introduced to process thought. I stand amazed.

Also to be recognized as contributing mightily to the possibility of this new center for process psychology at Shangdong Normal University, are John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, co-founders of the Center for Process Studies in Claremont, California, as well as the rest of the staff and directors from this wonderful institution. The Center for Process Studies has played an integral role in advancing and promoting the process philosophy vision—though never before has this vision been so rapidly appropriated as it has here in China over the last decade.

The key individuals that must be mentioned in this regard are Zhihe Wang, Fengjiang Gao and Meijun Fan, whose tireless efforts have been largely responsible for the successful and speedy transmission of process thought from West to East, from Claremont to Shangdong and to China at

large. It is an amazing story and a true example of a Whiteheadian “adventure of ideas.” I want to thank Zhihe for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today, and also thank both Zhihe and Mei for their dedication and generosity of spirit in carrying the torch of postmodern constructive philosophy, as well as for their kindness to my family and me.

To my Whiteheadian way of thinking, the Chinese academy should be admired for how quickly they have perceived the importance of process philosophy, in its many applications, and the determined manner in which they have persevered with their newfound interest. Regrettably, the Western world at large, and its intellectual community in particular, has not been as perceptive, although even in the West significant progress has been made in recent years. Perhaps China’s pursuit of Whiteheadian ideas will provoke and heighten further interest in other parts of the world.

China’s interest in process philosophy was in a sense anticipated in what I suspect has become a “required” Whiteheadian citation for any presentation given in the East—so far be it from me to break tradition. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead indicates the similarity between Chinese philosophy and his own views: “the philosophy of organism seems to approximate more to some strains of Indian, or Chinese, thought, than to western Asiatic, or European, thought. One side makes process ultimate; the other side makes fact ultimate.” (7)

I cannot help mentioning here the great changes that I have observed since my previous visit to your wonderful country. In 1986, my mother, Dr. Marjorie Kiewit, took my adolescent niece and nephew on a trip along the coast of China and to Beijing. I managed to join the expedition as an extra chaperone for the children. My mother had first come to China with her second husband in 1980 on a tour organized by Stanford University, as part of an effort to introduce China to some major industrialists from the United States, and their business methods. From what I have seen during my short time here, that introduction seems to have accomplished its purpose!

Before our journey to Shangdong yesterday, my mother and I were able to once again spend time with her Chinese friends in Beijing. Seeing old friends gave a reassuring sense of permanence amid all the change that has come to this country.

I must think that these massive and unprecedented changes occurring in China—and in the rest of the world, for that matter—may account in part for China’s openness to new ideas, especially those ideas that are compatible with its rich philosophical and spiritual traditions, and this includes recent as well as ancient modes of thought. In *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, the theologian, Hans Kung, observed in 1988 that “the future of the [Chinese] world will be determined not only by its ability to shake off modern colonialism and imperialism—something that it has largely done—but also by its ability to, if not avoid, then at least limit the negative effects of modern science, technology, industry, and democracy.” (123) In particular, in Kung’s postmodern vision:

- “science will not be irresponsible, but will be tied to ethical norms;
- technology will not enslave human beings, but will make them its masters;
- industry will not destroy the natural foundations of human existence, but will preserve them;
- democracy will not neglect social justice in favor of individual freedom, but will, in the spirit of freedom, allow justice to be realized;
- and finally, the transcendent dimension will again come to be valued—for the sake of the humanity of humankind.” (123)

I believe that a constructive postmodernism based upon the Whiteheadian/Hartshornian tradition can help China—and hopefully the rest of the world—move towards these vitally important ideals.

I recently read a book by Anne Pomeroy, entitled *Marx and Whitehead: Process Dialectics and the Critique of Capitalism*. Pomeroy argues convincingly that process philosophy can serve as an effective and enlightening metaphysical foundation for Marxist thought, unifying Marx's so-called humanistic or philosophical writings with his later economic critique. This is one example of the diverse applications of Whitehead's thought for developing an encompassing constructive postmodern philosophy that seamlessly moves between physics, biology, psychology, sociology, economics, and religion and spirituality. This, of course, represents the goal of speculative philosophy, which Whitehead describes in terms of the "fusion" of science and religion. Early on in *Process and Reality*, Whitehead states: "Philosophy frees itself from the taint of ineffectiveness by its close relationship with religion and science, natural and sociological. It attains its chief importance by fusing the two, namely, religion and science into one rational scheme." (15)

In the first half of the twentieth century, my favorite science fiction writer, Olaf Stapledon, recognized the spiritual and visionary possibilities of Whitehead's thought. Significantly, Stapledon's other major inspiration was Marxism. His novels of "future history" describe a Whiteheadian/Marxian vision of world and community building, augmented and driven by the development and expansion of human, and cosmic, spiritual possibilities. In *Last and First Men*, Stapledon provides an overview of the five billion year future of humankind, while in *Star Maker*, Stapledon expands the scope of his vision to encompass not only the history and future of our universe, but also of all universes in their role of creating and enriching the Universe as One, the ineffable Star Maker. Perhaps a constructive postmodern psychology can actualize some of Stapledon's magnificent visions of future possibilities.

I realize that my science fiction preferences might seem like a bit of a digression, but it does serve the purpose of introducing my personal interest in process psychology. Perhaps describing my own interest in process psychology will serve to highlight some of the more general advantages of this line of thought.

My lifelong search has been to find a way of coherently integrating the full range of human experience with modern scientific knowledge. One might say I was captivated by the “transcendent dimension,” referred to above by Hans Kung and cherished by Olaf Stapledon. In particular, my early concerns arose out of my encounters with altered or nonordinary states of consciousness, such as mystical and paranormal experiences. I started looking for a theoretical framework capable of both integrating these extraordinary experiences with everyday human existence, and reconciling them with scientific knowledge and logical understanding, without thereby losing their distinctive importance

My search moved from Eastern and ancient philosophies and religions, through the modern scientific disciplines of developmental, cognitive, and depth psychologies, and on to Western philosophies such as those of Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger. But, while all of these systems provided important clues and insights, in none of these did I find a unifying mode of thought capable of accounting for the full range of human experience, including the scientific and religious dimensions.

During my doctoral studies at Emory University, a bastion of Whiteheadian philosophy over the years, my advisor, Robert Paul, suggested I do a directed reading in Whitehead with William Beardslee, who was retiring at the end of the school year. As I had no previous interest in Whitehead, Dr. Paul’s suggestion seemed to come out of nowhere. I can only say, in retrospect, that his inspired recommendation was one the most fortunate of my life. I spent the next semester

reading Whitehead's major philosophical works, along with several other process philosophers. By the end of the term, I knew my search for a unifying system of ideas was over.

People often want me to tell them what I find so compelling about Whitehead's philosophy of organism. Unfortunately, due to the scope, complexity, and originality of Whitehead's thought, this question is difficult to answer briefly. At this gathering, however, your standing interest in process psychology encourages me to attempt a short summary of what I think are some of the most exciting possibilities that Whitehead's novel approach offers to the field of psychology.

Of central importance to psychology in particular, is Whitehead's metaphysical generalization of "experience" to account for the fundamental make-up of all real entities in the universe. By understanding experience in terms of the primitive reception, transformation, and unification of past activity (or feeling), Whitehead is able to use a single mode of interpretation for the many levels and types of entities that we encounter in our world—for example, subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, cells, and the various combinations they generate to make up our universe.

By interpreting the universe in terms of primitive, and mostly unconscious, synthetic experiential activity, it is possible to coherently understand not only the interactions between the molecular and cellular activity within the human body, but also how the body and mind, and the mind and world, can be in interactive relationship. These questions of mind/body interaction, and how we have access to an objective world outside our minds, represent two of the most vexing metapsychological issues of the last several hundred years. Usually, they are simply ignored by the field of psychology, and declared beyond science's province. This attitude seems wrongheaded and defeatist to me. By providing a coherent way of envisioning the basic relationship between our bodies and our minds—or in more process-oriented terms, our bodies and our psyches—as well as

how we can obtain objective information about the world, I believe that Whitehead puts psychology on a solid foundation, something that until now has been sorely lacking. By using human experience as the metaphysical paradigm of reality, Whitehead places psychology at the heart of scientific and philosophic inquiry.

Whitehead approaches the issue of the nature of consciousness along the same lines as William James, America's greatest psychologist, but in a more metaphysically coherent fashion. Consciousness is understood not a "thing," but rather as a way of experiencing reality. Consciousness is defined as a mode of feeling, which occasionally arises out of the unconscious experiential activity of certain high-grade organisms. Therefore, Whitehead's variety of "panpsychism" attributes primitive experiential activity to all actualities, but conscious experience to only highly complex organisms. This helps circumvent such problems as whether simple animals, or even plants and rocks, possess consciousness, which have been the undoing of less sophisticated panpsychist philosophies. Also bearing on this issue is Whitehead's important distinction between the many types of social organization in the universe. For example, while animals generally possess a centrally organized social order, a tree is a more diffuse society, and a rock even more so. In the case of a rock, the question of experience is more accurately addressed to the true enduring individuals that make up the rock: its unified experiential centers—namely, the individual molecules composing the rock aggregate.

While this may seem a bit far a field and philosophical for a talk on psychology, the question of how to define consciousness or experience takes on great relevance when, for example, similarities are drawn between human and computer intelligence. From a Whiteheadian perspective, the similarities are interesting, but not fundamental: a matrix of computer elements are simply incapable of generating the central or dominant occasion that arises from the rich nexus of

neural feeling found within the human brain. The computer totally lacks a synthesizing and unifying center capable of generating experience. This is primarily a matter of “feeling”; the highest experiential activity composing a computer “brain” (atomic and molecular feelings) is much more primitive than the neural activity found in a human brain (complex cellular feelings). One involves the electrical flow of data through circuitry; the other involves the transmutation and creative synthesis of feelings from other entities in the environment. One produces information for the benefit of human activity; the other produces the activity of human experience. But since most psychologists are still debating what consciousness is, it is easy to see why they have a hard time distinguishing a machine from a human being. This is not a good situation, to my way of thinking, and I find it very useful to have Whitehead’s ideas to sort out and clarify such issues at a foundational level.

Another matter at the level of neuroscience deserves comment. To the extent that neuroscientists leave the human psyche out of the picture, that field will be hard pressed to account for the true nature of brain activity. From the perspective of process psychology, the psyche’s dominant occasion creates the final integrative unification found in human experience. It also influences brain activity: directly and causally impacting neural activity through its achieved experiential integrations. A coherent metaphysical formulation of how the psyche and brain function within this reciprocal relationship has been described in detail, for the first time, by Whitehead’s philosophy of organism. To the degree to which this crucial interaction between brain and psyche is left out of the equation, neuroscience will remain impoverished and incomplete.

A similar criticism might be directed at the study of memory and brain function. However, I should note that cognitive psychology has been much more inclined to consider the role of human awareness in memory consolidation and retrieval, probably motivated largely by experimental

necessity. However, from a process perspective, there still remains a major omission in their approach. Attributing all memory to various types of neural storage mechanisms ignores the fundamental source of human memory, according to Whitehead: namely, the psyche's direct feeling of past events, which is the metaphysical basis of all memory. Of course, the brain and its neural networks represent an important dimension of the past events that are being felt by the dominant occasion, and certainly play a crucial role in human memory; but another dimension of memory is the psyche's direct perception or "prehension" of its own past occasions of experience. Helping to determine how the brain and psyche interact to produce the unique phenomena of human memory can be an important contribution of process psychology.

Understanding human experience and consciousness as arising out of the flow of past feelings from one's world, one's body, and one's own past moments of experience has many other important implications for psychology. Turning to the opposite end of the spectrum from neuroscience, we find my special area of interest: transpersonal psychology. This field studies those experiences that lie far beyond the realm of our average everyday lives, for example, psychical phenomena such as telepathy and telekinesis, mystical revelation and spiritual insight, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences. By envisioning the human psyche as creating itself not only out of its brain activity, but also from its vague intuitions of the entire past universe, Whitehead's metaphysics makes process psychology take seriously the extraordinary range of transpersonal phenomena that appear within human experience. Whitehead himself suggests in several passages that telepathic communication is a real possibility in his philosophy. More generally, this "telepathic" intuitive potential, characteristic of all moments of experience, offers a mode of experiential access to all entities and processes occurring in the universe. This, by itself, opens up a powerful point of departure and grounding for the serious investigation of transpersonal

and spiritual experiences, which are so often ignored or marginalized in modern scientific and philosophic practice—even in psychology.

In the area of depth psychology, or theories of the unconscious psyche, Whitehead offers a clear way of thinking through the contributions made to the psyche by its present social relationships, the body, and the enduring effects of past relationships and experiences. All of these sources of feeling flow together from the depths to contribute to the formation of each new occasion of experience. Personality deviations and behavioral disorders can be envisioned in terms of habitual patterns of emphasizing, or blocking (“repressing”), these various sources of feeling through more or less effective strategies, mostly unconscious in operation.

Thus a Whiteheadian perspective provides at least three main avenues to pursue for approaches to psychotherapy: one’s relationship with one’s own past moments of experience (the psyche), one’s relationship with one’s body, and one’s connection with one’s world of ongoing social relationships. All three have served as therapeutic paradigms in the West, individually and in combination. For example, various types of body-oriented psychotherapy are aimed at restoring the body’s natural vitality and spontaneity of movement through freeing up the blockages formed in the past as character armor, to use Wilhelm Reich’s phrase. Of course, in Reich’s view, the muscular armoring of the body is a direct correlate of the individual’s psychological defense mechanisms, while releasing these blockages and the related defense mechanisms allows the individual greatly increased freedom and creativity in their contemporary social life. The overlap and interplay of these various dimensions of causal influence is readily apparent, as is the need for theoretical clarity to adequately deal with these psychological complexities. Whitehead’s theory of past feeling flowing into new occasions of experience, thereby synthesizing and unifying the world, our bodies, and our own past, provides a useful way of understanding how these various sources

contribute to our psychic structure and also offers clues for how to resolve problematic modes of adaptation.

Many of these differences between therapeutic models and styles involve a matter of emphasis on which of these three dimensions to use as the starting point for initiating psychological change. Whitehead's ideas can be helpful for sorting out these questions of therapeutic emphasis, methods, and goals. In an essay in *Searching for New Contrasts*, John Cobb makes some insightful suggestions in this regard. (207-24)

The complexity of the interaction between the flow of feeling from the body, the past psyche, and the larger social environment leads Cobb to argue for a "complementarity of healing practices through body and soul for both bodily and psychic problems" (212), as well as for the employment of "alternative approaches" or strategies to these problems. A human being is such an enormously complicated organism that there is no single system of healing fully capable of taking into account this complexity. Thus a variety of psychotherapeutic methodologies are called for. Cobb also refers to the interplay (within a process model of psychology) that occurs between the causal influences of the past, the freedom of each new occasion to help determine how these influences will be integrated, and the spiritual dimension—a "force operative in all living things that works for healing and growth." (218) Cobb concludes with a word of caution about problems that may arise in psychotherapy from the use of substantialist, versus process, modes of understanding, which can lead "in some cases to encouraging self-centeredness, in others to seeking a lifelong, fixed potential, and in still others, to celebrating the autonomous individual." (224)

I have focused on the areas of process psychology that are of special interest to me: namely, depth psychology, psychotherapy, neuroscience, philosophy of psychology, and transpersonal

psychology. However, a quick review of the process psychology bibliography, compiled by the Center for Process Studies, reveals that I have barely scratched the surface of the work that has already started in applying process thought to various psychological issues. Permit to illustrate this diversity with a partial summary of some other areas where process psychology is underway:

- psychiatry and psychoanalysis
- Jungian thought and Archetypal psychology
- feminist theory
- pastoral counseling; chemical dependency treatment
- cognitive psychology; evolutionary psychology; physiological psychology
- developmental psychology; personality theory
- artificial intelligence; nonhuman experience; consciousness studies
- parapsychology
- and, phenomenology of time and space

One area that might be particularly ripe for development within a process perspective is “ecological psychology,” as originated by Ulric Neisser at Emory University. I do not know much about ecological psychology, but it certainly sounds like it should be amenable to a Whiteheadian approach!

While the above list of applications of process psychology is very impressive, there remains a great deal of work to be done. The task of constructing a unifying theoretical basis for process psychology has barely begun, and despite all that has been accomplished, it will be no easy job. But I have confidence that with the center now in place here in Shangdong, and with the many

other scholars in Europe and around the world working on these problems, a full fledged process psychology can not be too far from realization.

Good luck with our work. Our world needs your help.