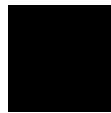


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**The Method of Speculative Philosophy**

An Essay on the Foundations of Whitehead's  
Metaphysics

Johan Siebers

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Die Philosophie stellt eben alles bloß hin, und erklärt und folgert nichts. - Da alles offen daliegt, ist auch nichts zu erklären.

Die für uns wichtigsten Aspekte der Dinge sind durch ihre Einfachheit und Alltäglichkeit verborgen. (Man kann es nicht bemerken, - weil man es immer vor Augen hat.) Die eigentlichen Grundlagen seiner Forschung fallen dem Menschen gar nicht auf. Es sei denn, daß ihm *dies* einmal aufgefallen ist. - Und das heißt: das, was, einmal gesehen, das Auffallendste und Stärkste ist, fällt uns nicht auf.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, §§126, 129.

I am I not any longer when I see.

This sentence is at the bottom of all creative activity. It is just the exact opposite of I am I because my little dog knows me.

Gertrude Stein, from *Henry James*, in *Four in America*.



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## Preface

The topic of this study is the relation between Whitehead's analysis of experience in terms of events (or, as he called them from *Process and Reality* onwards, occasions or actual entities) and the nature of speculative philosophy, i. e. the body of philosophical thought centering on the question of the nature of *being*, or *existence*. It offers an interpretation of the status of the claim that actual existence is experiential and eventual. As things stand, this claim seems to be an arbitrary metaphor from a bygone age of abstruse speculation. With the aid of an analysis of what Whitehead meant by speculative philosophy, I try to show that this is not the case. Implicitly, this study is a defense of the lasting importance, for all types of philosophy, of the kind of thinking that goes under the heading of what Whitehead called 'speculative philosophy'. In my interpretation of speculative method in Whitehead's philosophy and of the ontological status of its core 'categoreal notions', as Whitehead calls them, I depart significantly from the available readings of Whitehead's philosophy. This applies to current views within the school of process philosophy, as well as to the (largely implicit) views prevalent in the more dominant schools of thought, where Whitehead remains a marginal thinker.

By presenting the analysis in as conceptually tight a form as possible, I have tried to make the thought stand on its own feet. I think that, by doing that, I have somewhat made my work into a piece of speculative philosophy itself, rather than a scholarly treatise *about* speculative philosophy. But this is what is to be expected, for speculative philosophy is the attempt to frame a formal interpretation of the whole of our experience; it cannot be approached from an external standpoint, for it can only be understood as claiming relevance to that standpoint just as much as to any other aspect of experience. Just as actual existence is unbounded because non-entity is not a boundary (PR 66), so speculative thought has no sidelines at which to place ourselves to watch it run its course.

As a brief example of how speculative philosophy relates to other, more particular areas of human experience, I have added an appendix on speculative philosophy and literature, focusing on Whitehead's influence on Edmund Wilson, the literary

critic who wrote the classical survey of symbolist and modernist literature *Axel's Castle*.

In my interpretation I have refrained from giving more exposition of Whitehead's highly complex and technical system than absolutely necessary. There are two reasons for this. First, I did not want to obscure an argument that, in and of itself, is already quite complicated. Secondly, there are a number of very good expository presentations of Whitehead's philosophy. As far as metaphysics proper is concerned, Ivor Leclerc's *Whitehead's Metaphysics: An Introductory Exposition*, published in 1958, still sets the standard. I have made constant use of it.

I have found it necessary to give rather full quotations in some places in order to present the questions at issue in as clear and precise a form as possible; for the same reason I have not been able to avoid some repetition. Philosophical understanding knows nothing, as Whitehead said, of a royal road of airy phrases. It also knows nothing of a proliferation of technical detail where fundamental conceptual problems are dealt with. In such a case, and I think the topic of this study qualifies as one, staying close to the texts and to the particular phrases and expressions of the philosopher in question, is a way of staying close to the problems.

Whitehead started to publish his speculative philosophy in 1925, with the publication of *Science and the Modern World*. Although there is less of a sharp break between the earlier writings in mathematics, mathematical logic and philosophy of nature and the later, metaphysical ones than we used to think<sup>1</sup>, I have concentrated on these later books (save for a section on *The Concept of Nature*, a book published in 1920). For the continuity appears to lie more in the fact that the earlier writings can be seen as having their own proper niche, or interpretation, in the general speculative system, rather than offering their own version of it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For this discussion, see especially Munnik (1987), who traces the central concept of limitation in its development from the earliest writings to the latest. Others who have dealt explicitly with the philosophical importance of the works written before 1925 are Emmet (1945), Martin (1974) and Mays (1959), (1977).

<sup>2</sup> As to the continuity (or discontinuity) of the speculative phase itself, see Ford (1984), who has shown us where we have to take its character as a work in progress seriously. I will not explicitly go into the historical development of Whitehead's speculative philosophy, for I am concerned with the bearings of its central systematic ideas.



I have relegated all discussion of other interpretations to the footnotes, and have limited myself to referring only to those interpretations that explicitly take into account the area on which my reading focuses. To this general principle section 3.3 is the exception. There I outline the divergencies between my interpretation and Nicholas Rescher's recent comprehensive survey of the field of process philosophy.

In 1965 Gottfried Martin wrote 'Whiteheads Philosophie muss als eines der wichtigsten Ereignisse der Philosophie des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts angesehen werden. Sie ist schwer verständlich und das Ringen um ihre Interpretation beginnt erst jetzt.'<sup>3</sup> I think I am not overstating the impression I (and with me, I feel, many others) get when going over the literature on Whitehead since that date, that we still do not quite know what is going on in his philosophy. With my analysis, I hope to have contributed something to the project of finding out. Some progress, surely, has been made between 1965 and today. We may agree with Michael Hampe when he writes:

Man ist sich über die Bedeutung Whiteheads (unter seinen Auslegern) im klaren und kann sagen, worin sie besteht; Whitehead ist der einzige Philosoph des 20. Jahrhunderts, dem es gelungen ist, die Tradition der abendländischen Metaphysik zu erneuern und fortzuführen, ohne in der Transformation ihrer klassischen Probleme die neuzeitliche Metaphysikkritik ignorieren zu müssen, das heißt sich des geistigen Anachronismus schuldig zu machen.<sup>4</sup>

But up until now, most studies have centered around a confrontation of salient aspects of Whitehead's philosophy, like his concept of event, experience, nature, subjectivity or extension, with the criticism of traditional renditions of these concepts, as found in large sections of twentieth-century philosophy.<sup>5</sup> It is concluded that Whitehead's theory cannot be reduced to traditional metaphysical theories, and that therefore the criticism of traditional metaphysics does not apply to Whitehead. A question that is ignored by most commentators, however, is what the status of *any* metaphysical claim as such is. But that question lies at the heart of the criticisms of

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<sup>3</sup> G. Martin 1965, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Hampe 1997, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of recent work, see Hampe *op. cit.*

metaphysics, whether they be empiricist, positivist, phenomenological or hermeneutical. The very idea of the possibility of establishing meaningful propositions with universal applicability is what is challenged in contemporary philosophy, ever since the idea of historicity has assumed the central place it has kept to this day. Whitehead's claim that a metaphysical theory is hypothetical, finite and never final may well seem just another way of dismissing metaphysics, a way, however, considerably worse than other options, because Whitehead would still hang on to some notion of metaphysics as the rational inquiry after the general characterization of all experience, thereby entangling himself in a glaring inconsistency. What is needed, therefore, is an analysis of the nature of metaphysics (or, as Whitehead calls it, speculative philosophy) in the Whiteheadian theory. In this study I try to give that analysis and thereby contribute to substantiating Hampe's claim, cited above.

This study was defended as a doctoral dissertation in the Faculty of Philosophy of Leiden University, on 15 December 1998. I would like to thank my *promotor*, Prof. Dr Wouter Oudemans, for his philosophical guidance and support. I am grateful to Dr James Bradley, of Memorial University of Newfoundland, for his efforts as *referent* of this dissertation, and for a host of perceptive comments, in discussions and in writing, that have helped me improve the quality of my exposition. Weaknesses and flaws that, undoubtedly, remain, are my own. Finally, I would like to thank Drs Maaïke Engelen and Mr. Martien Wijers for many invaluable conversations on metaphysical topics, and for their assistance in editing the typescript.

Previous versions of part of the text have been presented as papers at various institutions. An ancestor of 2.3 was read before the annual convention of the Canadian Philosophical Association in June, 1997; the appendix was presented at a conference on 'Graduate Student Research in Continental Philosophy' held in Leuven (January-February, 1997), and parts of chapter 4 were presented as a paper at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal in May, 1998.

JIS, 2 October 1998

## Introduction - Nothing Behind the Veil

### *1 Order of this Study*

This study centers around a single question: What is the status of the kind of thinking, and the kind of claims, that go under the heading of 'speculative philosophy', as the term is used in Whitehead's philosophy? Whitehead claims for his philosophy generality, rationality and a meaningful answer to the question as to the nature of existence in general and actual existence in particular. We will examine these claims, and will present an interpretation of the peculiar nature of speculative thinking which shows how Whitehead's claims about the nature of existence and his understanding of speculative thought are intrinsically connected. Both sides of his work - the form and the content so to speak - need each other and each of them only becomes intelligible in the light of the other. In this mutual dependence of form and content lies the nature and relevance of his philosophy, and we think that most literature on Whitehead has not taken sufficient account of this aspect of his work, thus reducing his work to a set of at times intelligent but rather naive philosophical anachronisms. We hope to show that this opinion is seriously flawed.

Whitehead's philosophy has a number of different components. Apart from the foundational aspect, consisting of an account of speculative method and the categorial structure of reality, the larger part of his metaphysical writings are concerned with detailed investigations into the theory of extension, the theory of civilization (including ethics and aesthetics) and the analysis of the metaphysical categorial structure in the light of a host of considerations of scientific and philosophic character. We will not deal with these parts of his philosophy, but restrict ourselves entirely to the foundational aspect. We think this is needed because in our research we have established a considerable divergence between our own views and the vast majority of prevalent interpretations of the basic structure of Whitehead's philosophy. It would have been impossible to set about examining the other parts of his philosophy without clearing up the foundational issues first.

Moreover, such an examination would in itself afford material for at least another book, and probably more.

The order of this study has been designed with two conflicting, but unavoidable, objectives in mind. The first one was to give a reasoned analysis of Whitehead's thought on the nature of speculative philosophy, its basic claims about the nature of existence and the interdependence of the two. The other was to do justice to the peculiar nature of speculative thinking. These two objectives, both equally germane to the analysis, conflict in the following way.

Speculative thinking deals with ultimate notions, notions incapable of analysis in terms of other notions, more far-reaching than they. This means that there can be no definition of the notions we employ in speculative philosophy, at least not in the sense of providing an explanation of these notions in terms of other notions, which supposedly have a meaning that is fixed and clear, at least insofar as their use in the definition is concerned. Speculative ideas presuppose each other, and can only be elucidated by bringing out the ways in which they presuppose each other. Because each one of them presupposes all the others, there is no privileged starting point, so the movement of speculative philosophy is not one of a linear exposition of ideas and theories in terms of clearly stated fundamental notions. It is a circular movement, going over the same notions and issues over and over again in order to explicate more and more what is contained in them. An exposition *more geometrico* is in the nature of the case impossible. Whitehead himself was acutely aware of this aspect of speculative philosophy. He designed *Process and Reality* explicitly according to the model of a circular, spiral-like movement in which the same themes continually reappear, and in which notions are brought in to clarify others while in turn being clarified by these others afterwards.

That it should be the case that speculative philosophy works like this is significant, as we will try to explain in the text. But it burdens the expositor of such a philosophy, for if he is not to mislead or even seriously misconstrue such a philosophy, he has no alternative but to follow the procedure. When the speculative philosopher finds it is of the essence of speculative thinking that it can never start from notions and premises that are severally clear and distinct, from which the theory can be developed in deductive fashion, the expositor will fail to see the

essence of the philosophy if he tries to restate it *more geometrico*. We think that much of the misunderstandings concerning Whitehead have something to do with the pressure in academic philosophy to acknowledge no other type of exposition as valid but the one that is so singularly unsuited for speculative philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

But it is not the task of someone writing an interpretation of a philosopher, to do what he did, or to try and do it better. Therefore we have tried to give as linear an analysis as possible, but we must say that, in a significant way, it has been impossible to do that everywhere. Thus, especially concerning the basic notions of the analysis of the so-called 'actual entity' (*existence, actuality, experience, immediacy, becoming, temporality*), everything we say in one place still presupposes everything else we say in all other places, to put it bluntly. But we feel also that this is warranted, and needed in order to do justice to the specific character of this philosophy. At the same time, there can be no dismissal of the need to be logically consistent and to follow an argument wherever it leads.

But these demands must not be mistaken as denying the character of speculation (PR 9).

Finally we want to present two quotations of Whitehead, expressive of our remarks:

The besetting sin of philosophers is that, being merely men, they endeavour to survey the universe from the standpoint of gods. There is a pretence at adequate clarity of fundamental ideas. We can never disengage our measure of clarity from a pragmatic sufficiency within occasions of ill-defined limitations. Clarity always means 'clear enough'.

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<sup>6</sup> In this context we may mention that Lewis Ford, who has analysed the structure of Whitehead's later writings better than anyone else, once expressed his idea (in conversation) that Whitehead had, for all the care he had taken to suit the form of exposition to the matter of exposition, not freed himself sufficiently of the treatise format of exposition. According to Ford, in that conversation, Whitehead's thought requires something like a philosophical journal (like Jaspers) or a set of meandering but sustained reflections (like Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*). In the light of the present study, we completely agree with this estimate, and our analysis of the interdependence of method and content, centering in the notion of *expression*, can be read as a defense of it.

The dilemma of metaphysics is that either you are clear, and leave much out, or else you are adequate - and muddled. . . . You come to a point where clearness is impossible. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Part of answering the question this section began with lies in indicating why this is so. We have attempted that in chapter 2.

The order of this study, then, is as follows: In the introduction we present an overview of the philosophical landscape of Whitehead's metaphysical writings. Here we sketch the meaning of the question of the nature of existence and we introduce Whitehead's answer in terms of a process of occasions of experience. We also introduce the connection between philosophical thought and its object, and in order to clarify it we discuss the relation between philosophy and an other form of thought, namely science. This chapter should provide a sense of having crossed the territory, and having set out the points for further consideration.

In chapter 1 we repeat the analysis of the introduction, but now with explicit consideration of the main issues, to be discussed in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 1 we discuss the central difficulty of Whitehead's metaphysics of experience, namely the thought of an act without an actor - the 'occasion' in Whitehead's terminology. In line with our earlier remarks we should here not expect a final account of its intelligibility; that should emerge in the rest of the text. Next we bring up the question of the ontological status of the occasion. The literature on Whitehead is divided on this point; we sketch our own position relative to the others. Having done that, it becomes necessary, in the light of giving an answer to the question about the status of the occasion, to discuss the method of speculative metaphysics in more detail. We introduce the basic procedure, referring to 'misplaced concreteness', the notion of a 'scheme of ideas', the notion of applying the scheme of ideas ('interpretation') and to the 'rationalism' of speculative philosophy. At the end of chapter 1, the field should be laid out in which to explore the interconnection between Whitehead's concept of speculative methodology and his occasions-analysis of actual existence, to bring out how they mutually imply each other and to show

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<sup>7</sup> ESP 93; Kline 1963, p. 15.

how they render each other intelligible. This analysis will incorporate our answer to the question about the status of the occasion.

We begin with the methodological side of the analysis in chapter 2. This chapter moves towards the claim, that speculative thinking is a form of *expression*. In it we try to analyse the meaning of this claim through a consideration of three issues: the meaning of the systematicity of speculative thought, the meaning of the openness or creativeness of speculative thought (speculation is a 'moving beyond' what is already known) and the role of a fundamental aspect of the occasions-analysis (the so-called 'ontological principle' - the principle that apart from occasions there is nothing) in the analysis of the notion of expression. Here the interdependence between method and content is stated from the perspective of method. In the course of our discussion of the ontological principle we will in passing use a suggestion afforded by Heidegger's well-known idea of the ontological difference in further clarifying the structure of Whitehead's philosophy. The last section of chapter 2 consists in a discussion of a problem that arises out of the ontological principle. It will lead the way to understanding the limits of speculative philosophy - at least in our view. At the end of chapter 2 we should have established the meaning of speculative philosophy as a mode of thought characterized by *expressive coherence*, a term that sums up the analysis of chapter 2.

In chapter 3 we continue the occasions-analysis by returning (1) to the question of categoreal structure, (2) to the question about the status of the occasion, (3) to the fundamental role of the concept of experience in analysing the structure of the occasion. We position Whitehead's speculative metaphysics of actual existence over against the essentialist mode of thought of traditional metaphysics, a mode of thought we also find in much process philosophy after Whitehead. Also we show how the occasions-analysis affords a criticism of the fundamental role of the distinction between appearance and reality in traditional metaphysics. Whitehead's metaphysics of occasions is positioned over against this general trend of traditional metaphysics, thus continuing the discussion of Whitehead's originality (1.2) and adding extra content to the meaning of the title of the introduction, *Nothing behind the veil*. The fourth section of chapter 3 is devoted to a comparison between Whitehead's occasions-analysis and the doctrine of *actus essendi* of Thomist metaphysics. We have

added this section because it allows us to bring out the nature of the occasions-analysis with some clarity. In it we have not striven after historical completeness; therefore we have chosen for a single presentation of the Thomist doctrine in a form that turned out to be quite suited to the purpose of comparing it with Whitehead's philosophy, namely the article 'Form and Existence' by the analytic philosopher Peter Geach.

At the end of chapter 3, the whole picture of the speculative metaphysics has emerged, and the fourth and final chapter is therefore a summary exposition of the (winding) way we have come and our results. Here the relation between the whole of the analysis and the main objective of philosophy as Whitehead conceived it, the elucidation of daily experience, is the ordering principle. Thus this chapter, apart from summarizing the study, also tries to place speculative philosophy in its context, namely life as we live it.

There exists an intimate tie between life as we live it and speculative philosophy. For speculative philosophy tries to develop a rational way of understanding the whole of experience, and therewith one of its aspects is its appropriation in conscious life.<sup>8</sup> This understanding is a form of expression (as we will show). It can play a role in shaping and transforming experience. For Whitehead, this aspect of speculative philosophy embodies its great importance. For as we think, we live. In enhancing our awareness of this truth by explicating its implications and tracing its ramifications, speculative philosophy at once displays itself, understands itself and refers itself to the full spectrum of the passage of occasions of concrete experience it has singled out as its central idea. In the appendix to the study we give an example of the interplay between the philosophy of concrete experience and concrete experience itself in the form of a discussion of the function of Whitehead's ideas in the work of the literary critic Edmund Wilson.

The reader may find it helpful to return to this overview of the order of the study at the beginning and end of each chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> See Henrich 1982, pp. 99-124, for a clear exposition of this aspect of speculative thought. Cp. n. 78.



## *2 A Few Remarks on Whitehead and Contemporary Philosophy*

The objective of this study is to contribute to the ongoing project of exploring Whitehead's philosophy, which is now entering a second phase. The first phase has been devoted almost exclusively to the development and elaboration, within the circle of devoted Whiteheadians, of an internal kind of treatment of the works Whitehead produced in his so-called 'third period', from 1925 to 1941.<sup>9</sup> Apart from this there has been a relevant contribution in the field of theology, but philosophically speaking Whitehead's work has remained, it is safe to say, without any influence worth mentioning. The reasons for this are many, but it is my conviction that they are not of a philosophical nature. The present study can be read as an attempt to establish this by example.

However, recently a persistent and growing tendency in academic philosophy has been developing, both in the English speaking world and on the Continent, to rescue Whitehead's philosophy from its isolation, and insert it into more widespread currents of thought.<sup>10</sup> The merits of this line of enquiry are twofold, historical and philosophical.

Historically speaking, total neglect is not the proper approach to appreciating Whitehead's genius, as a scholar recently observed.<sup>11</sup> There is a lot to make up for here, for instance Whitehead's role in the development of logical atomism and the theory of logical constructions, the corner-stone of twentieth-century analytical philosophy, the history of which remains to be written.<sup>12</sup> But also in a strictly

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<sup>9</sup> Leclerc 1958, §2.

<sup>10</sup> See Lucas 1989 and Hampe and Maaßen 1991a,b for an overview.

<sup>11</sup> McHenry 1992, p. ix.

<sup>12</sup> Russell (1914, pp. v-vi) writes that the basic idea of logical atomism was Whitehead's. But Whitehead considered it a half-truth. The fact that Russell seized the idea and published it was the beginning of the cooling of their friendship, as Russell remarked in his autobiography (1968, p. 101) after quoting a letter Whitehead sent him a couple of years later. The letter throws an interesting light on Whitehead's way of working. I will quote an excerpt by way of illustration:

... My ideas and methods grow in a different way to yours and the period of incubation is long and the result attains its intelligible form in the final stage, - I do not want you to have my notes [the notes on logical construction which Whitehead gave Russell to read] which in chapters are lucid, to precipitate them into what I should consider as a series of half-truths. I have worked at these ideas off and on for all my life, and should be left quite bare on one side of my speculative existence if I handed them over to some one else to

philosophical sense there is, to my mind, much to be gained by seriously looking at Whitehead, and this holds good not only for philosophies dealing specifically with the notion of process or event. A fortunate thing about the growing attention to Whitehead from non-Whiteheadians is that interesting aspects of his work, which had gone relatively unnoticed because of the isolated position it had acquired, are now for the first time being discovered.

Whitehead's isolated position in twentieth-century philosophy is largely the result of the fact that, where practically all major philosophers have joined hands in the attempt to get rid of philosophy as conceived of in any of the more classical modes - Kantian, Cartesian, premodern - Whitehead frankly places himself among the western tradition of first philosophy, conceiving of his own contribution as a 'footnote to Plato', indeed as a Platonism for the modern age:

[I]f we had to render Plato's general point of view with the least changes made necessary by the intervening two thousand years of human experience in social organization, in aesthetic attainments, in science, and in religion, we should have to set about the construction of a philosophy of organism. (PR 39)<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, Whitehead's philosophy, though thoroughly 'relativized' in that it has no place for an absolute, universal realm over or behind the spatio-temporal

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elaborate. Now that I begin to see daylight, I do not feel justified or necessitated by any view of scientific advantage in so doing. . . . (Letter dated 8 January, 1917, quoted in Russell 1968, p. 100f.)

Many years later, in a reference Whitehead wrote (in 1935) for Ayer on behalf of the publication of *Language, Truth, and Logic*, we can still see Whitehead's enthusiasm for the idea of logical atomism (which had developed into logical positivism), and his opinion that it needs a speculative foundation in order to be fully successful. Whitehead's own metaphysics of experience can be seen, to some extent at least, as providing just that foundation. We find the letter in Ayer's biography (1977, p. 162f.):

Ayer is an enthusiastic exponent of the more modern movement termed 'Logical Positivism'. Carnap is the leading exponent of this school at present. Ayer shows remarkable ability in expounding this doctrine and discussing its various bearings. . . . I am not in my own person a Logical Positivist. The claims for it are overstated. . . . But I cannot imagine a greater blessing for English philosophical learning than the rise in Oxford of a vigorous young school of Logical Positivists. The assigning of the proper scope to their method, the discussion of the new problems which it raises or of the new light which it throws on old problems will revivify and reconstruct the presentation of the topics of philosophic thought which the new doctrine fails adequately to deal with. It will rescue the philosophy of the 20th century from repeating its complete failure in the 19th century, when history and science overwhelmed it. . . . It is a subject on which I feel strongly.

<sup>13</sup> 'Philosophy of organism' is the name Whitehead himself uses sometimes for his philosophy.

process<sup>14</sup>, is from the start at odds with those forms of thought that proclaim the 'end of philosophy' as the end of rational foundational thought. Whitehead's philosophy can be said, however, to bring with it the end of a particular form of foundational thought, and with that of a particular conception of rationality and metaphysics. From its standpoint, we could claim, to discard philosophy is to be equally tied to the unnecessary and indeed false presuppositions underlying classical and modern metaphysics. This means that the idea of a first principle or ground, an idea generally abandoned in twentieth-century critiques of philosophy (Deweyan pragmatism, Sartrean existentialism, Wittgensteinian talk of language-games, deconstructivist thought, to name some) is not so much simply discarded (as being intractably tied up with erroneous fictions), but rather reinterpreted. It is my contention, that this reinterpretation, which is a way of continuing what most philosophers would want to destruct - philosophy as the attempt to frame a rational, general understanding of things - is interesting for us precisely because it is brought about by focusing attention on what is usually held to constitute the main reason for driving a wedge between traditional philosophy and contemporary thought: the groundlessness of things, the critique of substance, the dislike of aetiology, the all-pervasive reality of historicity, in short: the event-character of the real. But Whitehead's speculative philosophy is the *metaphysical* instauration of the thought of being as self-realizing, self-creating event. The inevitable result is that his writings are usually regarded as naive anachronisms. For, so it seems, Whitehead attempts the impossible: to give a general account, an account in terms of essences, of what any essential account must of necessity overlook, namely full, individual, situated, historical existence. Whitehead tries to say the unsayable. Careful analysis will show, however, that 'anachronism' hardly applies to the self-conscious, thorough reconstruction and temporalization of philosophic method Whitehead accomplishes

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<sup>14</sup> The thought that what something is in itself is the same as what it is to other things returns constantly in Whitehead. Also, I would like to call to memory Whitehead's remark 'All truths are half-truths'. Cp. Bradley 1991: Whitehead's concern can 'be summarily stated as: what is the relation of the proposition "All is relative" to itself?' (p. 130). This points to an almost Bradleian conception of the absolute, as always there but never to be grasped, simply because all relations to it are of necessity abstractive in character. But Bradley's monism is replaced in Whitehead by a pluralism of many events. There is no nonrelational absolute standing behind the scenes. At the same time, the many actual entities are not simply internally or externally related. Relationality is based on the ontological fundamental character of events indicated by the word 'togetherness'. See 2.3.4.

in order to develop a philosophy of being as event that fits naturally in what Leibniz, perhaps Whitehead's most important precursor<sup>15</sup>, called *philosophia perennis*.<sup>16</sup>

Why would anyone want to do this, why should anyone be interested in the, from a scientific as well as from a contemporary philosophical point of view, rather hazardous undertaking of 'perennial philosophy'? There is an answer to this question as short and effective as it is unacademic: because it rings true. There is also a longer, explanatory answer. Whitehead's philosophy is a philosophy of concreteness. This term stands opposed to reductionism in all its forms. Reductionism is a figure of thought where, so to speak, the *explanandum* is seen as nothing but the *explanans*. It has lost touch with the idea that what is explained is always more than the explanation - that, without this thought, explanation loses its distinctive character, its *raison d'être*. It is a form of intellectual *hybris*, spiritual pride, and the rise of science with the accompanying anti-intellectualism of philosophy, has given it free reign.<sup>17</sup> The result is that thought ends up in a solipsist, almost narcissistic splendid isolation, which inevitably leads to its deconstruction, on account of its excluding itself from relevance to the ordinary stubborn facts of daily life.<sup>18</sup> By centering philosophical thought around the notion of concreteness it is possible to put the unity of the effort intellectually to grasp the world back into perspective. When we do this, it emerges that philosophy as the attempt to frame a general understanding of things, or, as Whitehead would put it, to frame a general scheme capable of interpreting experience, has nothing to do with constructing world-pictures, abstract characterizations of the world we live in based on state-of-the-art theories in empirical science, and so on. The understanding of concrete being lends unity to human activities, fosters a living sense of reality, a reality that is *given*, not

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<sup>15</sup> Fetz 1981, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Leibniz 1875-1890, vol. III, p. 624f. (Letter to Remond, 26-8-1714): 'La verité est plus repandue qu'on ne pense, mais elle est tres souvent fardée, et tres souvent aussi enveloppée et même affoiblie, mutilée, corrompue par des additions qui la gâtent ou la rendent moins utile. En faisant remarquer ces traces de la verité dans les anciens, ou (pour parler plus generalement) dans les anterieurs, on tireroit l'or de la boue, le diamant de sa mine, et la lumière des tenebres; et ce seroit en effect *perennis quaedam Philosophia*.'

<sup>17</sup> In this context Whitehead speaks of 'obscurantism', once the rightful province of the clergy, but now a common characteristic of the scientific community, 'by merit raised to that bad eminence' (FR 44).

<sup>18</sup> PR xiii.

‘present’ in an epistemologically burdened sense, before anything else in the way of theory, explanatory model or manipulable resource comes about.

But questions about the concrete existence cannot be profitably discussed by staying on the side-line. They would degenerate into musings about subjective experience, making no difference. They require that we allow ourselves to become engaged in the full spectrum of philosophical issues. We have to put our nose to the grind-stone. This accounts for the highly technical character of *Process and Reality*, in which virtually all themes of modern philosophy are interpreted in terms of the speculative scheme.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 Reading Whitehead

Sometimes a philosopher is ahead of his time, and survives his time. For one thing, this usually means that his own time has little interest in what he has to say. For another, it means that the time he addresses has to free his words from the fossilized sedimentations of what was alive once, but is now dead. Readers of such a philosopher have to breathe life, and with that living presence, into the mute facticity of what is present as a thing of the past. If the writings of a philosopher from the past - even the fairly recent past - turn out to lend themselves to such an enterprise, then this means that there is something in them which is still, or only now, contemporary.

I think reading Whitehead can be an example of this. Whitehead’s name is well known; his place at the origins of analytic philosophy is secured through his co-authorship of *Principia Mathematica* and most academic philosophers know one or more of his aphorisms, like ‘[t]he safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato’ (PR 39).

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that Whitehead’s philosophy is a closed system. This is avoided precisely by Whitehead’s conception of philosophy. Bradley 1993, p. 28: ‘Whitehead est le premier philosophe à avoir élaboré consciemment un *système non-fini*, essentiellement incomplet et incomplétable - un système de différenciation qui produit la différence. C’est en ce sens spécial que, après Whitehead, on doit comprendre la construction analogique comme étant la forme par laquelle la réflexion exprime le fait que l’*explanandum* est toujours plus que l’*explanans*. C’est seulement de cette manière que la réflexion est capable de combiner compatibilité et faillibilité, de dire “ce qui est vraiment” sans prétendre aucunement au statut “pathétique” de “vérité métaphysique dernière” (ESP 125).’

Also, his work has been a decisive influence on the extensive but somewhat marginal school of so-called process philosophers and theologians.

Nevertheless it remains the case that Whitehead's presence in contemporary philosophy is hardly felt at all. One can even say that in most philosophical circles a clearly negative, dismissive, attitude towards his work is prevalent. Whitehead wasn't a real philosopher, we hear; he was a free-floating mystic, a scientist who in his old age came to feel he had to leave to posterity a medley of naive musings on God and the soul. Or we are told that his conception of philosophy as the attempt to set up a general scheme of ideas with which all experiences can be interpreted is 'metaphysical' and therefore outdated and wrong-headed. Without elaborating this claim here, it is easy to see that a philosopher who, so self-consciously as Whitehead, sees himself as engaged in speculative metaphysics, will not be taken seriously by either one of the dominant movements in recent philosophy - whether the analytical or the continental.

But there is another side as well. Even if we leave to one side for the moment the relatively closed reception of Whitehead's work in the circles of process thinkers, there have always been philosophers who have felt that Whitehead's writings contain a valuable contribution to philosophy, who feel that precisely because Whitehead thought of his philosophy as a new form of speculative metaphysics, tailored to fit the needs of modern times, he has been able to develop a rational mode of thought that enables us to center our philosophical understanding of the world and ourselves on concepts like *novelty*, *passage*, *immediate experience*, *creativity*, *openness*, *difference* and *immanence*, concepts which are the defining characteristics of speculative thought since the nineteenth century. While most if not all classical forms of speculative thought operated in terms of a conception of rationality that encased actual existence in a fixed set of (a priori) principles or essences (ontological, metaphysical, political, ethical, scientific) - one of the major reasons for the abandonment of speculative thought since the nineteenth century - with Whitehead we get a reformed understanding of what rationality is, one which allows for and stresses precisely those factors that were so alien to it before.

Whitehead has done this simply by treating the issues that were under debate in his day: the relation between nature and mind, the problem of epistemological and

ontological foundations, the place of evolution in nature, the problem of the existence of the outside world, the idealism-realism controversy, the nature of experience, the relation between scientific theories and philosophy. Implicitly or explicitly Whitehead addressed all these issues, always from the perspective of elaborating a unified scheme of 'generic notions adequate for the expression of any possible interconnection of things' (PR xii).<sup>20</sup>

By taking this approach, Whitehead's thought has acquired its unique character. For it is an attempt to develop an understanding, at a general level<sup>21</sup>, of the nature of reality, of what it means to be, which is as such meant to shed light on the host of

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<sup>20</sup> It must be noted that Whitehead did not proceed by a piece-meal approach to detached philosophical questions. In fundamental philosophy, specific arguments are determined to a large extent by the metaphysical presuppositions accepted; metaphysics accordingly has, as one of its central roles, the task of determining the 'presuppositions inherent in any reasoning'. But there can be no argument for them. 'Philosophy is either self-evident, or it is not philosophy. The attempt of any philosophic discourse should be to produce self-evidence' (MT 49). This, of course, has far-reaching ramifications for philosophic method, and one of the aims of the present study is to show what they are. If self-evidence is not produced, philosophic procedure degenerates into the 'I'm telling you-method' Whitehead himself is often accused of. It follows that the highly technical analysis of actual existence as we find it in PR is not so much a set of arguments for Whitehead's position, but rather a description aimed at self-evidence concerning the topic (in this case the nature of actual existence). The self-evident is that which is incapable of explanation by reference to something else, but forms the foundation of all explanation. I will say that we cannot *explain* the self-evident (because there is nothing to explain and we would indeed incur an infinite regress if we tried to give an explanation), but that we can *explicate* it. Speculative metaphysics not only searches for what is self-evident, but also explicates it, that is brings out what is implied in it. It may also help to free the mind from the false idea that explanation can be ultimate, and thereby contribute to a better appreciation and understanding of the nature of reality. To put this in Leibnizian terms: the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' cannot be answered by giving the reason, or the ground for there being something at all, for we would then have to go on asking why this ground is there, and so on. But seeing this is so is an important part of coming to see 'the way things are'. Therefore *asking that question* is not useless at all. It is a first step in coming to see that thinking about 'the last things' is a matter of explication, understanding, awareness rather than of explanation in terms of grounds or reasons. In what follows I propose to see Whitehead's rationalism, the hope that at the bottom of actuality we shall not find mere arbitrariness, as containing the thought that explanation is a sub-species of explication, rather than the other way around. Thus rationalism's aversion of arbitrariness is the hope, that finding significance and explicability doesn't break down, rather than the drive to find ultimate grounds.

<sup>21</sup> The generality of the metaphysical scheme is formal rather than material. This means that Whitehead is not engaged in determining the highest genera of the contents of the world and their interrelations, but is laying out the formal, categorial structure of reality as such. The formal-material distinction, though important, should not be taken too strictly, for things and their antics do *exemplify* the categorial structure, and we have, according to Whitehead, no a priori intuition of categorial structure. We arrive at it through a process of imaginative generalization, which is fallible, partial and revisable.

particular issues mentioned above. It always tries to clarify them by interpreting them in terms of this attempt, this project of arriving at a set of interdependent self-evident notions. The most condensed form of statement of which his philosophy is capable, is: *reality is what makes a difference* (AI 197).<sup>22</sup>

We will in the remaining part of this introduction present Whitehead's basic thoughts in a somewhat less condensed form by looking at the concept of experience, the relation between science and philosophy, the nature of philosophical thought as an open-ended process and the nature of actuality as a passage into novelty.

#### *4 The Concept of Experience*

What is experience? Generally speaking, we can approach this question in two different ways. In the first approach, the answer to the question contains a systematic exposition about the nature and structure of experience: about the subject of experience, about its object, and about the relation between the two. 'Experience' is here taken as an objectifiable, uniquely identifiable, aspect of reality (for example, human sensory experience) which can be subjected to an explanatory investigation. The result of this line is often an explanation of experience in terms of something which is no longer experience; the reduction is an explaining-away.

If, on the other hand, we try to understand experience without explaining it in terms of what it is not, we soon find that we cannot express this understanding without bringing in other notions as well: experience is not an isolated element of reality. As Whitehead says, 'Whenever we attempt to express the matter of immediate experience, we find that its understanding leads us beyond itself' (PR 14). We have not explained experience away, but neither have we understood experience entirely in its own terms. And still, experience is what it is and not some other thing.

Here the speculative moment in philosophical thinking becomes relevant. Whitehead defines speculative thought as 'the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our

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<sup>22</sup> Later we will distinguish between 'reality' and 'actuality'.



experience can be interpreted' (PR 3). The scheme<sup>23</sup> has to be logical, that is free of inconsistencies; it has to be necessary in the sense that it should warrant its own universal applicability and it has to afford an interpretation of experience, which means that everything of which we are conscious should have the character of being a particular instance of the general scheme. But what is of prime importance in the present context is the requirement of coherence. 'Coherence' means 'that the fundamental ideas, in terms of which the scheme is developed, presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless. This requirement does not mean that they are definable in terms of each other; it means that what is indefinable in one such notion cannot be abstracted from its relevance to the other notions. It is the ideal of speculative philosophy that its fundamental notions shall not seem capable of abstraction from each other' (PR 3).

In other words, insofar as experience is a fundamental notion in speculative philosophy, we cannot explain it in terms of something else; rather it is one of the notions in terms of which all explanations are stated. What we can, and should do, is elucidate the nature of experience by showing how it is related to the other equally fundamental notions.

This basic insight has vast consequences for philosophic method. The rigid method of empiricism, in which thought is pinned down to 'the strict systematization of detailed discrimination, already effected by antecedent observation', breaks down (PR 4). Precisely because in metaphysics we are trying to get a hold of what is always and everywhere the case, the method of observing differences does not work. We have, right at the outset, to acknowledge the fact that we are always already in the midst of interpretations, of the coherent interplay of fundamental notions. In other words: philosophy has always already begun. We employ interpretative schemes without knowing exactly what they mean or imply, and whether they are correct or not. All we know is that some application exists, for else we wouldn't be using it. Philosophy is part of our attempt to improve our schemes, and thereby our conscious experience itself, but it does not initiate interpretations. It

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<sup>23</sup> On the use of 'system' and 'scheme', see chapter 1.

distinguishes itself from other intellectual endeavours in that it seeks maximum generality (including reflective consistency), but like the others it is as much a factor in the conscious lives of human beings as anything else we do, feel or think. It does not stand outside the general fact of our cognitive and practical functioning. We in fact use notions, and do things, which are only partly clear to ourselves, and one of the things we do is to try and get clearer about what we think and do.

For example, typically Whiteheadian notions like 'relevance', 'importance', 'creativity', 'experience', 'happening' all have a familiar use in daily life. But the full interrelations of their meaning are unknown. In philosophy we try to exhibit their meaning by bringing out these interrelationships, not by reducing the notions to basic ones which are supposed to be clear in themselves.

What does the peculiar nature of philosophical procedure entail for the philosophical analysis of experience? Whitehead describes experience as being basically 'concern':

[T]he Quaker word 'concern', divested of any suggestion of knowledge, is more fitted to express this fundamental structure [of experience]. The occasion as subject has a 'concern' for the object. And the 'concern' *at once places the object as a component in the experience of the subject*, with an affective tone drawn from this object and directed towards it. *With this interpretation* the subject-object relation is the fundamental structure of experience. (AI 176; my emphasis)

Methodically speaking, the analysis of experience starts by bringing it into relation with this word, 'concern', which we habitually employ. But Whitehead immediately adds that we can only use this word if we divest it of any suggestion of knowledge. What we are looking for when we use this word in the analysis of experience, is not a familiar instance of concern, which will always involve some amount of knowledge, but rather the formal determination of concern itself. 'Its basic expression is - Have a care, here is something that matters!' (MT 116). With this interpretation of the term 'concern', we can say that the subject-object relation is the fundamental structure of experience. The subject 'has a concern' for the object. In other words: being a subject means being such that you can have a concern about something, and being an object means being such that another can have a concern for you. The latter implies (1) that you exist, and (2) that you are a determinate factor in the actual world of the subject.

The former implies (1) that you are not yet determined and (2) that you have an aim, a goal, which is the background against which things stand out. Experiencing now becomes determining yourself out of the objects that ‘concern’ you, realising yourself in an act or occasion of self-creation. Whitehead remarks that the term ‘superject’ would accordingly be better than ‘subject’, since the subject is what it is in virtue of its experience (PR 222); it emerges into actuality. Here two things must be noted: first, Whitehead takes the concept of experience as the basis of the analysis of what it means to be actually existing (PR 18, 160). Secondly, each act of experience is inherently temporal in that it is a process (PR 16, 136, 138). (Thus ‘temporal’ means, at this stage at least, nothing more than ‘being in process’, or ‘passage’: experience has its being *in process*. We must resist the temptation to understand temporality-as-process in terms of our usual notions of temporality - be it those of dates, tenses, durations or extension - for doing that would be putting speculative metaphysics upside-down.<sup>24</sup>) The combination of the two fundamental notions of the analysis of what it means to be actually existing, *experience* and *temporality*, results in the claim that actual existence is self-realization (PR 222). For there is nothing underlying the act of experience which explains the actuality of the act of experience. ‘Experiencing’, we can say, is ‘becoming actual’. Thus actual existence is always a ‘becoming actual’, an *actualisation*, as Whitehead calls it.<sup>25</sup> The completion of process is the perishing of the occasion as an act of experience.

The notion of concern, though it implies an alterity, does not imply the isolatedness of subject and object, the reification of the opposition into two

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<sup>24</sup> Cp. CN 54, where Whitehead says that the temporality of nature, its character of a passage, should not be understood in terms of ‘the measurable time of science and of civilised life’. Although the notion of movement inherent in the notion of passage seems to assign a more important place to tenses than to dates, we can draw no definite conclusion from that at this point regarding the proper scientific or philosophical analysis of the space-time continuum. In this study Whitehead’s theory (in his philosophy of nature) of space and time will not be discussed.

<sup>25</sup> I will use ‘actualisation’ as a synonym for the self-realisation that defines the act of becoming. See PR 222. Whereas there are many types of entity, which are all ‘real’, only the entities that have agency can be self-realising. These are the actual entities, or occasions; they can be said to be acts of actualisation.

independent entities. This would reduce experience-as-self-realization to self-realization on the basis of experienced qualities, somehow originated by the interplay with the environment, while retaining a basic closedness to and for other instances of self-realization. For Whitehead, *what is experienced are the individual actually existing entities themselves*, which exhibit universals as factors in their own determination. Thus, as concern, experience is a 'togetherness in actuality'. 'Togetherness', just like experience, is another fundamental notion, only to be elucidated by bringing it into relation with others (PR 189). Thus, without flatly identifying the two, experience is togetherness and togetherness experience. Togetherness *simply means* that things are together, that they share a common world.

Whitehead thinks there are no forms of togetherness which are not derived from experiential togetherness:

The contrary doctrine, that there is a 'togetherness' not derivative from experiential togetherness, leads to the disjunction of the components of subjective experience from the community of the external world. This disjunction creates the insurmountable difficulty for epistemology. For intuitive judgment is concerned with togetherness in experience, and there is no bridge between togetherness in experience, and togetherness of the non-experiential sort. (PR 190)

In other words, 'experience' and 'togetherness' form a coherent (in the sense defined above) pair, each of them without meaning in isolation from the other. This question, of whether there is any other meaning of togetherness than togetherness in experience, is clearly of crucial importance. Whitehead says it is the 'final metaphysical question' (PR 189). We will return to it in chapter 3, here I want to point out that experiential togetherness is *like* coherence, and that this is no accident. For the scheme to be able to interpret experience, requires that it is *like* experience, in a sense to be explained later. What togetherness is for the individual acts of experience, coherence is for the formal scheme.

We can describe the togetherness of what actually exists in terms of experience; experience constitutes actual existence. Actual entities, or as Whitehead also calls

them, occasions<sup>26</sup>, do not 'exist' before they 'experience', rather, existence is being together with others in experience. As Whitehead says, there is no vacuous actuality, no entity devoid of subjective immediacy.<sup>27</sup>

It follows that, with the notion of an occasion, 'being for itself' is given. By this is meant that an actual entity, which is an act of experience issuing in a 'superject', 'functions in respect to its own determination' (PR 25). It functions thus in the mode of experience, in the *enjoyment* of an actual world shared with others. For the occasion realizes its existence by determining itself from out of its world. The occasion is essentially situated, and at the same time essentially existing for its own sake. Whitehead calls this the value-dimension of experience. It follows that all value is located in the actual existence of things themselves: value is the intrinsic reality of the situated act or event. Here we find another fundamental notion in Whitehead's speculative thought. A short passage in *Science and the Modern World* shows the speculative method of establishing coherence between fundamental notions, in this case between the act of experience - here called the *event* - and *value*, at work:

[Events] are the emergence into actuality of something. How are we to characterise the something which thus emerges? The name '*event*' given to such a unity, draws attention to the inherent transitoriness, combined with the actual unity. But this abstract word cannot be sufficient to characterise what the fact of the reality of an event is in itself. *A moment's thought shows us that no one idea can in itself be sufficient. For every idea which finds its significance in each event must represent something which contributes to what realisation is in itself.* Thus no one word can be adequate. But conversely, nothing must be left out. Remembering the poetic rendering of our concrete experience, we see at once that the element of value, of being valuable, of having value, of being an end in itself, of being something which is for its own sake, must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. (SMW 93; emphasis added)

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<sup>26</sup> In chapter 3 we will look closely into the term 'occasion'. The word 'occasion' in reference to an actually existing entity, is meant to point away from a substantial conception of entities, of 'thinghood'. What makes a concrete entity into an entity is that it is 'occasion' both *of* and *for* experience. The entity *is* its experiencing, its activity. I will use both 'occasion' and the more formal 'actual entity'. 'Actual entity' means nothing more than 'that, whatever it is, to which actual existence can be ascribed'. In Whitehead's philosophy 'actual existence' is understood as 'experience' and experience is not primarily a state of a subject or substance; in and of itself it is an occurrence: it is 'occasion'.

<sup>27</sup> On the vexed question of Whitehead's alleged panpsychism, see 3.5.1.

The connection between value and concern is obvious, and, since self-realisation lies at the base of actuality, actual existence is value-realisation. With this the term value has received an interpretation that fits the general scheme. Because of the intrinsic connection between value and the bare fact of existence, there are no fixed, essential transcendent values which serve as the parameters of value-realisation; rather, value is a dimension of actual existence and actual existence is the realisation of a definite, unique, singular event. There are no ideal values, but existence can be more or less valuable in the sense of encompassing more or less intense realisations of concernedness. Values - particular ways of realizing intensity of experience - are created and maintained in the self-realisation of actual entities, can be located in anything that contributes to the determinateness of actual entities and can be ingredient in the self-realisation of others. We may notice that value takes on an almost transcendental status, like the good in medieval philosophy, which surely complicates the development of an ethics along these lines. But on the other hand this account of value offers an interesting perspective precisely because values are redefined as concrete and situated dimensions of actualisation.<sup>28</sup> Morality in the narrower sense is one form of value:

Morality of outlook is inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook. The antithesis between the general good and the individual interest can be abolished only when the individual is such that its interest is the general good, thus exemplifying the loss of the minor intensities in order to find them again with finer composition in a wider sweep of interest. (PR 15)

We might say: morals serve life, not the other way around.

Why should we be moral in the sense expressed in the above quotation? For self-interest would seem to be the only motive for value-realisation on this general understanding of the structure of actuality. But Whitehead's philosophy overcomes the opposition between a deontological or virtue ethics on the one hand and an ethics of self-interest on the other, precisely because my existence *is* the existence of

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<sup>28</sup> See Lachmann 1994, esp. chapters 4 and 7.

others and vice versa. This follows from the formal analysis of experience as the realisation of mutual togetherness.<sup>29</sup>

Connected with the intrinsic relation between value and actuality, this allows us to say that the actual entity as such is taken up in a movement towards the good or the valuable (in the general sense we have established); the choice for partiality<sup>30</sup> or 'immorality' can only come about after the fact of the massive solidarity of the world has, in the form of an obstruction, a positive exclusion of the 'finer composition of intensities' that were available before. But it would seem that the experience of duty as lying at the base of morality can only occur when the situation of being isolated from others is taken as the starting point of the description of the metaphysical situation. In a world of thorough, ontological togetherness, value realisation becomes a matter of persuasion and commitment rather than of force and duty.<sup>31</sup>

We have seen that experience is a fundamental notion in Whitehead's philosophy, which we could call with justification a metaphysics of experience. In fact, the concept of experience is the central concept in the analysis of what it means to be, to exist. To be is to experience. Whitehead uses his notion of experience for a clarification of the relation between science and philosophy, a topic we will now introduce because, although it is not quite within the reach of this study, it greatly helps to clear up Whitehead's understanding of the special role of speculative philosophy within the whole of human intellectual activity.

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<sup>29</sup> Whitehead calls this formal structure the 'principle of relativity' (PR 22). This principle 'directly traverses Aristotle's dictum, "A substance is not present in a subject". On the contrary, according to this principle an actual entity *is* present in other actual entities' (PR 50).

<sup>30</sup> I mean partiality in the morally pejorative sense here. Every actuality is finite, and can realize intensity of experience only by excluding certain possibilities and including others.

<sup>31</sup> See AI, ch. V, 'From Force to Persuasion'. In recent work by Rorty the same opposition occurs as a central motive. See Rorty 1995a. The possibilities of a Whiteheadian ethics are largely unexplored, but see Belaief 1984 and Lachmann 1994 for useful contributions and further references.

The methods of the empirical sciences involve an essential element of modelling and abstraction. The experiential basis of science lies in abstracting the finite constituents of actual things from those things.<sup>32</sup> If we mistake the possible objects of all possible sciences for the extension of 'actual entity'<sup>33</sup> - and this is what we do when we subsume philosophy under the sciences - we find ourselves sooner or later in a situation where we are 'juggling with abstractions' (SMW 55), but never reach the goal of philosophical reflection, namely to 'exhibit the fusion of analysis with actuality'<sup>34</sup>, the source out of which science arises. It follows that philosophy is not a science.<sup>35</sup>

This, according to Whitehead<sup>36</sup>, is what happened to philosophy in the modern era. It has understood itself on analogy with the abstractive scientific scheme of the seventeenth century in which '[n]ature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly' (SMW 54). Thus philosophy has saddled itself with the unsolvable problem of interpreting reality satisfactorily in terms of mutually independent actual entities existing in empty space. How to account for causality, perception, mind, consciousness, will, our sense of being in a 'buzzing world', 'amid a democracy of fellow creatures'? <sup>37</sup>

The problem arises because an abstraction whereby the finite constituents of an actual entity are abstracted from that entity<sup>38</sup> was held to be the most concrete

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<sup>32</sup> ESP 85-86.

<sup>33</sup> I will sometimes use the less technical 'thing' instead of 'entity'. I base this on PR 21: '... the synonymous terms "thing", "being", "entity".' This should not be taken as implying a relapse into substance ontology; a 'thing' is anything about which we can think (CN 5). It is the task of philosophy to clarify the nature of the different categories of things - actual things, possible things, etc.

<sup>34</sup> ESP, *loc. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> ESP, *loc. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> SMW, ch. III, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> PR 50. Whitehead borrows the phrase 'buzzing world' with due acknowledgment from William James.

<sup>38</sup> There is also another form of abstraction: the emphasis that certain parts of experience receive and others don't in any finite act. Whitehead calls this (ESP 86) abstraction of the first order. Science is based on abstraction of the second order, whereby constituents of actualities are detached from those actualities.



rendering of actual existence. Whitehead holds that not only had the philosophers of the seventeenth century fallen into this trap, but also Kant and with him large parts of post-Kantian philosophy.<sup>39</sup> The fallacy of misplaced concreteness, as Whitehead calls it, consists in a neglect of the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered only as an exemplification of a partial set of categories. The success of a speculative scheme is to be measured by its comparative avoidance of misplaced concreteness.<sup>40</sup>

In modern times, not only has philosophy, as Whitehead strikingly puts it, been ruined (SMW 55), eventually, by the neglect of the need of a purely philosophical understanding of concrete existence, the foundation on which science rests - abstraction from empirical data - becomes threatened. The successful methodology of science, when universalised, becomes an instance of misplaced concreteness and in the end the willingness to speculate freely on the concrete setting of the method, which is a precondition for understanding it, disappears. This Whitehead calls 'obscurantism' (FR 43), a tendency he sees as being 'rooted in human nature more deeply than any particular subject of interest'.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, philosophy provides a criticism of abstractions, guided by a speculative elucidation of concreteness which is never final. It is a process with an open ending.

## *6 Philosophy as a Process with an Open Ending*

We can say that philosophy has a therapeutic function.<sup>42</sup> The mind that is caught in one-sided abstractions which it mistakenly takes to be the most concrete rendering of experience must be rescued from its false prison. But when this has happened (and of course it remains a necessity forever), philosophy isn't over. For only then can the full meaning of the observation quoted above that analysis and actuality are fused come to light. For consider: not only does it mean that the abstract patterns

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<sup>39</sup> See e.g. PR, preface and Part II, ch. VI.

<sup>40</sup> PR 7f.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed, he writes (*ib.*) that the scientists have taken over the role of obscurantists from the clergy.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed account of the conceptual relations between Whitehead's and Wittgenstein's views on the nature of philosophy, see Lucas 1995.

philosophical and scientific analysis yields are present in what actually exists, but it also means that the activity of analysis is part and parcel of actual existence. Thought does not stand over and against its objects; it shares in the characteristics that pertain to the nature of actual existence, it is as much part of the world as anything else. Thus thought, like reality, is a 'creative advance into novelty' (PR 128), and truth in speculative thought consists in the concrete movement and progress of understanding. Truth, like reality, *happens* and comes only as a factor in a concrete situation.<sup>43</sup> Like value, it is situated. That means that it can grow with time. 'Metaphysical categories are not dogmatic statements of the obvious; they are tentative formulations of the ultimate generalities' (PR 8).

An articulated general philosophy in its turn contributes to and can actually change the forms of human experience.<sup>44</sup> This is, again, an aspect of the fusion of analysis with actuality. 'Civilization' is the word Whitehead uses for this process. But what is 'civilization'? It is a 'fundamental notion', functioning in the process of self-realisation of concrete existents (occasions) and subject to changes and development. All its content it acquires from its function, the creation of novel experience. Civilization is, like morality, grounded in the nature of things, in what it is to be an actual entity. For in its restricted meaning 'civilization' is a typically human mode of the general characteristic of reality, namely the continuous transformation of character in the concrete activity of the self-realization of actual entities.

Speculative philosophy is an adventure of ideas, aimed at elucidating experience, progressive and never final. 'The pure conservative is fighting against the essence of the universe' (AI 274). Whitehead says that it is wrong to think that the undeniable ongoingness of reality, its temporal character, has to lead to a final resolution or destruction (PR 111). In the words of Tennyson Whitehead uses, there is no 'one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves'. There is always a new day and an unknown future. Whitehead uses the term 'peace' to describe the state in which

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<sup>43</sup> 'Knowledge does not keep any better than fish.' (AE 102)

<sup>44</sup> Cp. the preface to SMW, the first properly metaphysical book Whitehead wrote, where he writes: 'The key to the book is the sense of the overwhelming importance of a prevalent philosophy' (ix).

the creative process can let its own freedom and uncertainty be, knowing that life has permanence only in the living movement into novelty.

### *7 Actuality as Passage into Novelty*

Among contemporary thinkers Gilles Deleuze is probably the one who has written most seriously about Whitehead.<sup>45</sup> One of his thoughts is that difference is the only identity. As it stands, this is too one-sided a remark to be true, at least from a Whiteheadian perspective. But it does bring out the fundamental importance of the emergence of novel actuality. As we have seen above, Whitehead, too, characterized reality as 'what makes a difference'. Ultimately the notions of the one, the many and creativity (the 'principle of novelty' or of the 'production of novel togetherness' (PR 21)) are the most basic notions in the speculative scheme. Creativity is that 'by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. . . . An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the "many" which it unifies' (PR 21). The transitive use of *to be* in this quotation must be understood against the background of the analysis of experience indicated above. In experience, things are really inherent in each other, so that in a non-trivial sense, they can be said to *be* the others. This being in each other is essentially of the nature of a passage, a passing on (PR 213). The speculative scheme has in last instance no other task than to show that this way of understanding the nature of experience and with it the nature of actual existence lies in fact at the base of our daily and scientific experience.

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<sup>45</sup> Deleuze (1994) mentions an aspect of Whitehead that is germane to our interpretation, namely the fact that the status of what Whitehead calls 'categories' is not that of representations or essences, and that they can consequently be called 'categories' only in a transformed sense (cp. below, chapter 3): 'For categories belong to the world of representation. . . . That is why philosophy has often been tempted to oppose notions of a quite different kind to categories, notions which are really open and which betray an empirical and pluralist sense of Ideas: "existential" as against essential, percepts as against concepts, or indeed the list of empirico-ideal notions that we find in Whitehead, which makes *Process and Reality* one of the greatest books of modern philosophy' (p. 284f.). We agree in this estimate but note at the same time that Deleuze, neither here nor in the chapter on Whitehead in Deleuze 1993, pp. 76-82, where the relation to Leibniz is his topic, gives any analysis of his claim. Consequently, in our interpretation we have made little use of Deleuze's writings, but, like we said, we agree with his estimate regarding Whitehead.

Whitehead derives his philosophy from the simple scheme of *one, many, creativity* but he can only do that after philosophy has been liberated from misplaced concreteness. Philosophy is about concrete reality. It does not try to show how concreteness, the individual existent, can be built up out of abstractions or universals, for that is impossible. It tries to show how concrete fact can ‘exhibit entities [the universals] abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature’ (PR 20). It tries to show the presence in actuality of generality; this safeguards its rationality. It seeks a coordinated understanding of what goes to make up experience; this means that, in the turn towards the concrete, philosophy is no longer searching for a ‘true’ world behind the appearances.<sup>46</sup> In taking his starting point in experience, as ‘everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought’ (PR 3), Whitehead excludes right from the start those types of thought which seek to explain the structure of experience by recourse to something underlying or transcendent, itself not experienced. The problems we encounter in framing an adequate interpretation of experience (such as the problem of the existence of an outer world, the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, the relation between the one and the many, etc.) must all be solved or dismantled as meaningless within the field of experience. For this, Whitehead claims, is the only way to salvage the project of metaphysics, i.e. the endeavour to frame a general understanding of the nature of reality.<sup>47</sup> Of course, by stating this claim, almost nothing has been said. It remains to be seen if, and to what extent, the endeavour of metaphysics redefined in terms of the primacy of experience, can be substantiated. But it is clear where to start: we rule out all those attempts that locate the unity of experience and the generality inherent in experience in a realm which itself lies outside experience.<sup>48</sup> One of the most pressing problems this line of thought presents us with is that of the *status* of these claims about experience and philosophy. Are the basic concepts Whitehead employs (experience, actual existence, etc.) itself given in experience? Can the notion itself of philosophy as the endeavour to frame an

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<sup>46</sup> See AI, ch. XIV, ‘Appearance and Reality’ for the Whiteheadian analysis of ‘this not quite so fundamental’ opposition (AI 209). See below, 3.5.3.

<sup>47</sup> Ford 1984, p. 264, quotes from lecture notes taken by W. Hocking: ‘Whitehead . . . states: “We cannot go a step beyond experience, but we must go all the steps that experience imposes on us”.’

<sup>48</sup> In philosophy we have to become ‘truly empirical’ (FR 15).

interpretation of experience that is general and necessary (in the sense of bearing its own warrant of universality) be distilled from experience? In short, can this philosophy understand itself in its own terms, that is without a hidden or overt recourse to *some* sort of transcendence, be it a constitutive transcendental subjectivity or a transcendent realm of ideas, principles or categorial structure? The viability of Whitehead's philosophy hinges on these crucial questions, and we will discuss them in chapter 2.<sup>49</sup>

Whitehead said once in a seminar on the distinction between appearance and reality, 'there is nothing behind the veil'. For the event-analysis of actuality, nothing is hidden. That is where philosophy, the eliciting of self-evidence, begins.

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<sup>49</sup> In this connection we may refer to Hampe and Maaßen 1991a, pp. 10-32, where Whitehead's relation to contemporary debates about metaphysics is sketched. The dilemma of choosing between, on the one hand, a transcendental metaphysics of subjectivity which allows for no reconciliation between metaphysics and the scientific exploration of experience (as exemplified in the work of D. Henrich (see for example Henrich 1987), and on the other hand an anti-, or post-metaphysical form of philosophy which is overtly scientistic disappears in Whitehead, but only because of the speculative nature of his thought:

Whiteheads Bild der Natur ist nicht das der Physik, auch wenn es mit diesem vereinbar sein soll, und seine Theorie der Subjektivität verläßt sich an keiner Stelle auf die Psychologie und die Linguistik seiner Zeit. Genau in diesem spekulativen Zug der Whiteheadschen Theorie, in der naturwissenschaftliche [and psychological] Erkenntnisse zwar aufgenommen werden, aber gleichzeitig nur einen Aspekt des Wissens von der Natur repräsentieren, besteht für viele der anstößige Charakter dieser Metaphysik, letztlich begründet er jedoch die Stärke des Whiteheadschen Naturalismus gegenüber jedem Szientismus Quinescher oder sonstiger Prägung. Denn nur durch die über die Naturwissenschaften hinausgehende Spekulation wird es Whitehead möglich, die Alternativen 'Natur oder Subjektivität' und 'wissenschaftliche Letztbegründung oder Skeptizismus', die für die moderne Metaphysik so charakteristisch waren, zurückzuweisen. (p. 26)

We agree with this, but we also note that in the rest of the text no account is given of what speculative philosophy is. As indicated, we will return to this central issue. The discussion in Hampe and Maaßen (*ib.*) also, in passing, refers to Habermas's rejection of metaphysics (see Habermas 1985, 1988, White 1995). Although a comparison of Habermas and Whitehead would be highly interesting in this context because Habermas's position vis-à-vis metaphysics is attained by a nuanced reflection about the nature of universality and how it relates to the pragmatic, finite procedures and contexts in which it is manifested - topics with a clear parallel in Whitehead - we do not pursue the comparison here. Before we have developed a firm understanding of what Whitehead is doing himself, such comparisons are premature and may well obscure more than they clarify.

# 1 Whitehead's Metaphysical Writings

## 1.1 *The Hardest Thought*

In this chapter I will further introduce Whitehead's metaphysics in the form of a discussion of the parts of it that will be of importance later on for my analysis of the relationship between the nature of metaphysical thinking and the content of Whitehead's metaphysical theory.<sup>50</sup> The specific nature of this relationship forms, as I will argue, the foundation of his metaphysics. Right at the outset, I want to reiterate that in speculative philosophy as Whitehead defines it, all fundamental notions require each other. That means that in the clarification of one of them, the others are presupposed. There is no absolute beginning and clarification proceeds gradually, and in circles.

The hardest thought in this philosophy, but also the central one, implying the others and explicated by them, is the notion of the act of becoming. In an early definition of metaphysics Whitehead describes metaphysics as 'the determination of what truly exists'.<sup>51</sup> This, of course, is a simple restatement of metaphysics as it has been conceived throughout the history of philosophy, going back to Aristotle's classical formulation at *Metaphysics*, 1028b2-8:

And indeed the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt, namely, what being is [*ti to on*], is just the question: what is substance [*ousia*]? For it is this that some assert to be one, others more than one, and that some assert to be limited, others unlimited. And so we also must consider chiefly and primarily and almost exclusively what that is which *is* in this sense. (Ross translation)

Whitehead places himself squarely in the history of thought this question has given rise to. His, too, is the question as to what truly exists, what the nature is of that

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<sup>50</sup> For a general survey of Whitehead's philosophy, see Leclerc 1961c, Lowe 1962, Lucas 1989 and, most recently, Hosinski 1993; for a general survey of the whole field of process philosophy, see Rescher 1996.

<sup>51</sup> In the essay 'The Anatomy of Some Scientific Ideas' from 1917, published in AE; the definition occurs on page 123.

which exists in the primary sense of the word. This use of 'primary' is explained by Aristotle as follows:

There are several senses in which a thing may be said to 'be' ... for in one sense the 'being' meant is 'what a thing is', or a 'this' [tode ti], and in another sense it means the quality or quantity or one of the other things that are predicated as these are. While 'being' has all these senses, obviously that which 'is' primarily is the 'what', which indicates the substance of the thing.... Clearly then it is in virtue of this category [substance, *ousia*] that each of the others [quality, quantity, etc.] also is. Therefore that which is primarily, i.e. not in a qualified sense but without qualification, must be substance. (1028a10-29)

The word *ousia* combines the abstractness of 'being' ('beingness') with the concreteness of a particular individual. It thus signals that individual entity or particular thing which *is* in the full sense of the word. Of this 'thing' it can be asked *what it is* - what its nature is. This is the question of metaphysics. In *Process and Reality* Whitehead uses the Cartesian term *res vera* in this context.<sup>52</sup>

A fundamental characteristic of Whitehead's metaphysics, as well as Aristotle's, is that *ousia* is always a concrete particular, it is always *a* being. Part and parcel of concrete existence is particularity. Whitehead develops this seminal thought with his 'ontological principle'. We will be concerned with this in detail as we proceed. For now, we note that 'act' or 'actual occasion' or 'actual entity' are the names Whitehead gives to *ousia*. If we are to understand the concept of occasion or actual entity we must leave behind the customary way of thinking in terms of substances and qualities. The actual entity *is* its acting, it is nothing but acting or 'becoming'. In fact *ousia* is *acting* rather than *something which acts*. The act is not ancillary to the actor conceived as a priorly realized reality.

Whitehead's philosophical concern was to determine the nature and the relevance of this kind of ultimate questioning amid an intellectual and cultural climate that had become wholly scientific. He thought that metaphysics and science are intimately related, so much so that with the progress of science the need for metaphysics had grown more intense instead of less. For the growth of science brought with it a

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<sup>52</sup> PR 75: *Res vera* 'means "existence" in the fullest sense of that term, beyond which there is no other.' We find the term in the first Meditation (AT VII, 19). There it refers to what truly exists, what cannot be mere imagination.

metaphysics - the 'metaphysical scheme', as Whitehead usually calls it, of mind-body dualism - tainted by incoherence. The mind-body, or mind-nature dualism, so profitable for natural science is wholly inapplicable as a fundamental interpretation of ordinary, lived experience. If philosophy does not succeed in providing a proper alternative for this modern scheme of thought it will not regain its relevance and sooner or later science will follow in its wake, degenerated into a 'medley of ad hoc hypotheses'. Science requires a reference to a philosophical interpretation of concrete existence - i.e. to metaphysics - if it is to be aware of its own status. But if we can have no science without metaphysics, this does not mean that all science is in the end metaphysics. One reason for the careful separation of the two is obvious: in science, after due debate, agreement is possible, in metaphysics so far not.<sup>53</sup> Also, though less obvious at this point, science and metaphysics move in opposite directions. Science discovers abstract coordinations; metaphysics is concerned with understanding the nature of concrete existence.<sup>54</sup> As will emerge, this has far-reaching consequences for the nature of metaphysical analysis. It is part of the aim of this study to show that Whitehead's self-conscious way of taking account of this difference has allowed him to develop a rational metaphysics which is no longer marked by those characteristics that have discredited metaphysics before. Here I want to mention in particular the alleged finality of metaphysical statements, their a priori nature and the notion of a transcendent ground or transcendent fully realized real. Perhaps it was Whitehead's clear grasp of the nature of scientific procedure which led him to see the real difference between science and metaphysics as well as the necessity of metaphysics.<sup>55</sup>

In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead wrote: 'Men can be provincial in time, as well as in place. We may ask ourselves whether the scientific mentality of the

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<sup>53</sup> AE 123.

<sup>54</sup> Among other things, this means that metaphysics cannot forego, unlike science, the obligation to understand itself in its own terms. This is one of the meanings of the term 'speculative' used in this connection. This requirement has repercussions for every proposition within speculative metaphysics. The speculative proposition discloses the meanings of its terms as much as it presupposes them. For further elaboration, see 2.1.

<sup>55</sup> MT 63: 'There is one moral to be drawn. Apart from detail, and apart from system, a philosophic outlook is the very foundation of thought and of life. The sort of ideas we attend to, and the sort of ideas which we push into the negligible background, govern our hopes, our fears, our control of behaviour. As we think, we live. This is why the assemblage of philosophic ideas is more than a specialist study. It moulds our type of civilization.'



modern world in the immediate past is not a successful example of such provincial limitation' (vii).

A statement like this is typical for Whitehead's philosophical procedure and his aims. We can exhibit the subtlety of this at first sight perhaps rather trite remark in the following way: Whitehead writes with a special ear for language, and the insights and oversights it contains. Thus, his use of the term 'provincial' should not be divested of its original meaning of a conquered and annexed region originally alien to the conquering empire. But at the same time, we should realize that talk of provincialism in the analogical manner in which the word is here being employed implies at least the possibility of trying to be not provincial, that is, of taking an all-encompassing view on things. The statement shows the dialectic of these two termini in that it refers to the scientific provincialism as a *successful limitation*. There can be no 'universalism' in and of itself, but there can be, and indeed always already is, an inherence of the two poles in the concrete historical situation. Philosophy, rather than trying to capture ultimate truth in an ultimate formulation, tries to exhibit the concrete situation. Also, 'successful limitation' points to the nature of philosophical method, generalizing notions that are successful in limited areas of experience in the face of experience as a whole.<sup>56</sup> Thus the whole Whiteheadian world is present, but only implicitly, in these two sentences. The statement, casual enough as it seems, can be interpreted in terms of the speculative scheme - as indeed in the ideal situation all statements can - but this one is also itself a speculative statement, because of the phrase 'successful limitation'. The word 'limitation' is speculative for Whitehead.<sup>57</sup>

We often hear that in Whitehead's philosophy *event* and *process*<sup>58</sup> play a central role. We often hear that in process thought becoming is seen as more fundamental

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<sup>56</sup> See below, 1.6.

<sup>57</sup> This example is merely meant to indicate in a preliminary fashion the speculative movement. For the discussion of 'limitation' as speculative notion, which has a much wider meaning than that of the quotation (expressive of the nature of the relation between the finite and the infinite) see PoR, chapter 2. For an analysis of the fundamental role of the notion in Whitehead's work throughout all of his philosophical writings, see Munnik 1987, *passim*. In chapter 10 Munnik summarizes Whitehead's development in terms of the development of the notion of limitation.

<sup>58</sup> The word 'process' has become the customary name for the act of becoming. Although it has its drawbacks, mainly because it suggests a simple linear development in time, I will use it sometimes as a synonym for 'act' or 'event'.

than being, or at least not less fundamental, and some accompanying remarks to the effect that this runs like a common theme through much, if not all, philosophy since Leibniz, and has its corollary in elementary particle physics and in the historical and evolutionary orientation of the human and biological sciences since the nineteenth century. But in Whitehead the status of process is emphatically not a question of priority:

Process and individuality require each other. In separation all meaning evaporates. The form of process...derives its character from the individuals involved, and the characters of the individuals can only be understood in terms of the process in which they are implicated. (MT 97)

Contrary to widespread opinion<sup>59</sup>, Whitehead's metaphysics is thus not concerned with providing reductionist analyses of our ontological framework in process-linked terms, but with showing the interdependence of individuality and process. The actual entity is the *locus*, so to speak, where the interdependence can be seen. Its status is not that of the privileged kind of entity among the kinds that furnish the world but that of the primary category explicative of what it means to exist, to be an entity. The hardest thought in Whitehead's metaphysics is the idea of the actual entity precisely as nothing but a locus, a situation or occasion for existence. The thought requires a reference to the concept of a happening, an activity of becoming, without an underlying actor. For consider: it is only when the temporal dimension, allowing for a conception of the connectedness of entities not in terms of, say, beads on a thread, but in terms of a passing from one to the other, is *intrinsic* to the actual entity that we can make sense out of the basic notion of a real presence in the occasion of others (cp. 1.3) which is more than a mere representation (that would be no advance to the mind-world dualism of modern philosophy) but which is also not a real presence in the sense that the experienced entity is a part of the experient entity (in the sense in which for example the water is a part of the swimming pool). The past is a real presence in the occasion, but *as the past*. Whitehead develops the

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<sup>59</sup> See Kim and Sosa 1995, entry 'Process Philosophy'. Here we find the remark that process-thought involves the claim that 'several if not all of the major elements of the ontological repertoire (God, nature as a whole, persons, material substances) are best understood in process linked terms'.

notion of an immediate experience of others on this basis by analysing the participation of acts of experience in each other as essentially temporal: the antecedent act is taken up by the successor as the successor's past, the environment out of which it arises and as such can be said to be immediately connected to it. But it is only when we abandon the notion of an independently existing substance which is the actor of the act of experience that we can come to understand that the connection of acts with each other in a sequence in which one passes as the other becomes is a form of real participation, instead of mere contact, in which at the same time the individuality of each act is guaranteed. It is the act that connects. This is what we seek to gradually explicate as we proceed.

## *1.2 Whitehead's Originality*

Philosophy as the search for first principles - a definition congenial to Whitehead<sup>60</sup> - presents a traditionally recognized polarity in the distinction between *thinking* and *being*. More specifically, the concept of a principle gives expression to the coincidence of the two.<sup>61</sup> Another feature of traditional metaphysics, from Plato to Kant and Hegel, is the concept of substance. Whitehead's originality is constituted by a rejection of the latter feature, and a redefinition of the former.

Whitehead's relation to classical metaphysics is characterized by a rejection of the notion of substance as a permanent presence which needs nothing besides itself in order to exist as central to the concept of actual existence, and a rejection of the widespread tendency to view the subject-predicate form of the proposition as basic. The two go hand in hand:

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<sup>60</sup> PR 4.

<sup>61</sup> See e.g. MacIntyre 1990, p. 4f.: 'the modern question: "Are you speaking of what is or of the mind's apprehension through language of what is?" misses and obscures the conceptual point, which is that the application [of the concept of a principle], when sufficiently justified, gives expression to a coincidence of the mind with what is, to a certain kind of achievement in the mind's movement towards its goal.'

[T]he subject-predicate form of proposition is concerned with high abstractions, except in its application to subjective forms.<sup>62</sup> This sort of abstraction, apart from this exception, is rarely relevant to metaphysical description. The dominance of Aristotelian logic from the late classical period onwards has imposed on metaphysical thought the categories naturally derivative from its phraseology. This dominance of his logic does not seem to have been characteristic of Aristotle's own metaphysical speculations. The divergencies, such as they are, in these lectures from other philosophical doctrines mostly depend upon the fact that many philosophers, who in their explicit statements criticize the Aristotelian notion of 'substance', yet implicitly throughout their discussions presuppose that the 'subject-predicate' form of proposition embodies the finally adequate mode of statement about the actual world. The evil produced by the Aristotelian 'primary substance' is exactly this habit of metaphysical emphasis upon the 'subject-predicate' form of proposition. (PR 30)

Metaphysics tries to establish a scheme, capable of interpreting any and all experience (PR 3). Whitehead thinks that the concept of substance and the subject-predicate form of proposition are hardly relevant to this project, because they fail as interpretations of immediate experience. The word *scheme*, used frequently by Whitehead, should be read with the connotation it has in English, of an intentionally and carefully devised plan (*the scheme of things, a devious scheme*). A scheme is something to be used, something that lends unity to an undertaking. It has to assign a place to the 'abstract' concepts of substance and logical subject, but that cannot be a fundamental position, precisely because those concepts are to such a large extent involved in abstractions whereas the scheme seeks to articulate concrete, actual existence as we encounter it in experience.

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<sup>62</sup> JS - The subjective form of an act of experience, an actual entity, is the way in which it relates itself to its antecedents, its actual world. As 'presentational immediacy', i.e. the structure of immediate conscious sense-awareness of objects, it has the subject-predicate form: 'this stone is grey'. This mode of experience carries no reference to itself; therefore it is abstract. It is the form of apprehension which forgets to mention itself (PoR 33). The concrete mode can be stated as 'this stone *as* grey', where 'as' signals the relational aspect (PR 159). Cp. W. Künnle 1990, p. 125: 'Whitehead was correct in rejecting, what some analytical philosophers maintain, i.e. that the set-theoretical representation of singular propositions captures their essential nature. . . . Whitehead's system of categories provides concepts with whose help one can seek to define more precisely the combination of the categorially heterogeneous components of a singular proposition into the *unity* of a singular proposition.' Also PR 228: 'The appeal to a class to perform the services of a proper entity is exactly analogous to an appeal to an imaginary terrier to kill a real rat.'

The notions of scheme and interpretation<sup>63</sup> have to be understood as analogous to function and variable. For example: the function  $(x+2)$  is a *scheme* and the ordered pair  $\langle 2, 4 \rangle$  is an *interpretation* of it.<sup>64</sup> The metaphysical scheme operates in the same way. A notion from the scheme, such as, for example, *actual entity*, is like a variable. It can be satisfied by an at first hand indefinite, and unknown number of different contents of experience<sup>65</sup> (a bird, a beast, a tree, the child's idea of the mother (PR 53)) which all present an interpretation of the *schematic* term *actual entity*. What a function yields differs from one input to another. Analogously the content of *actual entity* as interpretation of what is experienced, will differ from one interpretation to another, preserving of course its bare, schematic meaning, articulated by the position the term occupies relative to the others in the scheme (PR 3).<sup>66</sup>

Interpretation thus means explicating the characteristics, or the nature, implicit in things by showing how they instantiate general ideas and patterns. The numbers 2 and 4 are capable of forming together an ordered pair which satisfies the function

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<sup>63</sup> See also 1.5.

<sup>64</sup> In *A Treatise on Universal Algebra* the 'scheme' is called the 'substitutive scheme' and the interpretations are called the 'originals' (UA 12).

<sup>65</sup> 'Contents of experience' is itself, of course, part of the scheme.

<sup>66</sup> I think it is worthwhile at this point to compare Whitehead's procedure to the way H.W.B. Joseph, the classical logician from Oxford, with whose work Whitehead was quite familiar (AI 229), understands the relation of species to genus:

[T]he differentia modifies the genus. And the genus also modifies the differentia. It might be said that three-sidedness is not confined to the genus figure; for a triangle is a three-sided figure, and N is a three-side letter. And doubtless, so far as the genus is the same in two species, the differentia may be the same in the species of two genera. But three-sidedness is plainly different in the figure, where the sides enclose a space, and in the letter, where they do not; and the genus as it were fuses with the differentia, so that each infects the other through and through.

For this reason the genus is not well described as a larger class including the smaller class or species within it. For the word 'class' suggests a collection, whereas the genus of any species is not a collection to which it belongs, *but a scheme which it realizes, an unity connecting it with things different from itself.* (Joseph 1916, p. 83f.; my italics)

I don't know if there is any historical connection between the use of 'scheme' by Joseph and Whitehead, but the systematic connection cannot be overlooked. This passage was pointed out to me by dr. A. Vennix of the University of Nijmegen.

$(x+2)$ , and this shows us part of what 2 and 4 are.<sup>67</sup> The same goes for what satisfies the speculative scheme: if, e.g. the Castle Rock at Edinburgh, is an actual entity, we should be able to interpret it as an instance of the scheme, exhibiting the general ideas and connections involved in it, in consistency with our experiences of the Castle Rock.

However, we must be careful not to push the analogy between speculative and functional analysis too far, because the speculative scheme stands under the strictest requirement of explicit self-referential consistency, where the function, as an incomplete expression, excludes itself as a possible value of its arguments. Also the invariableness of the connectives or logical constants is an assumption speculative analysis cannot take for granted.<sup>68</sup>

The scheme of first principles interprets experience. The rejection of the notion of substance and the subject-predicate structure of the proposition, as involved in high abstractions, finds its positive counterpart in the scheme of principles. We can see that the interpretation of experience is not the analysis of experience in factors that together make it up. To explain: the experienced world is simply what it is, and we take it as we find it. The scheme, when successful, is a means whereby to see everything as an exemplification (interpretation) of several principles. In this sense the scheme operates exactly like the classical metaphysical principles, in that it gives expression to the coincidence of thinking and being. The name for this coincidence, for successful interpretation, is *understanding*. But Whitehead is careful to note that no formal analysis can ever *yield concreteness* (PR 20). Part of the reflexive

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<sup>67</sup> This way of looking at the function is of course the opposite of a Fregean analysis, according to which one would say the function is a *Begriff* with a *Sinn*, and the output of the function its *Bedeutung*. See Geach 1969, pp. 48-50. We will not discuss this topic in detail because it seems to be simply an example of what is at issue between Whitehead and substance metaphysics. For the standard notion of predication drops out of the fundamental metaphysical structure of existence (cp. the beginning of the present section):

[T]he philosophy of organism is governed by the belief that the subject-predicate form of proposition is concerned with high abstractions, except in its application to subjective forms. This sort of abstraction, apart from this exception, is rarely relevant to metaphysical description. (PR 30)

So far as the exception is concerned, the Fregean analysis is adequate but the status of subjective forms themselves is that of abstractions. See Leclerc 1958, pp. 154-156.

<sup>68</sup> See Bradley 1994, pp. 168-170, and below, 3.2.

requirement of speculative thinking is that it bring out this fact, which is not the same as the scheme's inherent shortcomings due to the human weakness of insight (PR 4). In principle the relation between forms and concrete existence is not a productive one.<sup>69</sup> We could never reach concreteness by adding up forms (or as we have called them before, principles). The reflexive consistency of the scheme consists in the fact that it can interpret itself as offering an *explication* of what is *implicit* in concreteness rather than as providing an explanatory reduction of concreteness to constitutive elements. This side of speculative philosophy will concern us in more detail in chapter 2. Here we can say, in a preliminary fashion, that the contrast between *explication* and *explanation*, as I will call it<sup>70</sup>, is that of the difference between gradual elucidation within a circle of understanding and reduction to causes.

The elaboration of the meaning of the word *understanding* is effected by answering two questions: (1) given the insufficient character of the subject-predicate analysis of the proposition for metaphysical description (the framing of the scheme), what *is* an adequate form of statement, or can there be no adequate form? (2) how does the occasions-analysis fit the form of speculative statement?

In the context of these questions, Whitehead's originality can be formulated as follows: by coupling, in his notion of a scheme of principles, a speculative analysis of understanding with an analysis of being as event, Whitehead succeeds in providing the metaphysical instauration of themes which have been elaborated only in explicit opposition to metaphysics, *viz.* the thought of being as event and the thought of

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<sup>69</sup> As it invariably is in traditional metaphysics. The fundamental difference between forms and concrete existence has yielded one of the biggest problems of metaphysics: *individuum est ineffabile*, or, in the contradictory phrase characteristic of a form of thought that moves entirely within the polarity between form and formed, the 'principle of individuation'. One way of presenting our interpretation of Whitehead's speculative notion of occasionality is to say that in it, the fundamental difference is abandoned - and thereby the problems concerning individuality also - but that implies a reconception of speculative thinking itself. We will return to this topic in chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>70</sup> Little hangs on these words. I have chosen *explanation* as the opposite of what I take speculative metaphysics to be doing because the word is commonly used for a causal or quasi-causal account of *why* something occurs or is what it is, and *explication* is commonly used for an account of the *how* or *what* of something; its 'nature'. Cp. the motto, taken from Wittgenstein, with which I begin this study. Cp. also CN 32: 'Knowledge is ultimate. There can be no *explanation* of the "why" of knowledge; we can only *describe* the "what" of knowledge' (my italics). Metaphysics is a 'purely descriptive science' (Lecture notes by W. Hocking, Dec. 2, 1924, quoted in Ford 1984, p. 267). This point is quite fundamental.

experience as the horizon, so to speak, of understanding. The idea of a principle as the coincidence of thought and being is reinterpreted by an analysis of actual existence in such a manner as to avoid the metaphysically irrelevant abstractions of substance and subsistent form. For Whitehead, the notion of substance and subsistent form are reifications of what presents itself in concrete experience as the *exhibition* (PR 20) of generality by particulars. The relation of exhibition is not that of attribution. We might think that it is close to platonic participation, and Whitehead does indeed use the word 'participation' here (PR 20), but it must be understood that generalities, apart from their inherence in actual entities, are pure potentials with no actual existence of their own. It is only in actual experience that we encounter the difference between the generality and the particular which exhibits it. Reifying the two results in the problem that it becomes impossible to bring them back together again. But if we try not to reify them, we must conclude that the relation of exhibition is in some sense or other final, and then we cannot shake off the obligation to see how far it will take us in the interpretation of experience, and how intelligible it is. The claim that the notion of exhibition is in some sense ultimate is tantamount to the claim that the nature of actual existence is experiential, or act-like - for we invoke the act-analysis of actual existence to circumvent the problems presented by the reifications of 'substance' and 'subsistent form' - and also to the claim that the subject-predicate form of statement is unsuited for metaphysical analysis - for exhibition is not attribution. These latter two claims are each other's counterparts. The speculative notion of the occasion is the point where they come together. Thus, Whitehead's philosophy stands or falls with the status of the occasion.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a further introduction of these themes and their interdependence.

### *1.3 Occasions*

As we have said above, the status of the occasion or actual entity determines the status and nature of Whitehead's entire philosophy. There are, on the whole, three more or less received opinions concerning it, all of which seem unsatisfactory. They are (1) the identification of actual entities with certain particular contents of the



world, usually extremely small, elementary electromagnetic occasions.<sup>71</sup> This reductionism is entirely out of line with the general thrust of Whitehead's philosophy, as should be clear by now. If it contains any truth, as Fetz, for example, thinks<sup>72</sup>, then this would be a serious point of criticism. I think this interpretation is due to a misapprehension of Whitehead's method, more specifically of failing to grasp the nature of schematic analysis, and I will return to it below. (2) The identification of actual entities with any concrete existent whatsoever.<sup>73</sup> This is much better, but on the basic philosophical issue it begs the question for defining *actual entity* in terms of concrete existence is the world upside-down. (3) The view of the actual entity as having a transcendental function, as central element in a conditions-analysis of experience which is, on account of the speculative identification of experience with actual existence, also an analysis of generic properties of being. In this context, Whitehead can be said to join the medieval and the Kantian forms of transcendental analysis.<sup>74</sup> For the actual entity as an act of *becoming* is the condition for what *is* - the world and its contents; and because it replaces actual existence defined as present substance with actual existence defined as process it is also a generic description of the act of being (like the medieval transcendentals). This, again, is better than (2) but we cannot agree entirely with it, for reasons which will emerge in the course of the exposition.<sup>75</sup>

The occasion plays the central role in metaphysics, understood as the inquiry after the nature of concrete existence. But it is part of a scheme of notions, and has to be presented in connection with these other notions if it is to be understood. Also the meaning of 'concrete existence', and the relation it has to metaphysics defined as the construction of schemes interpretive of experience, must be laid out. We will do this in the remainder of this chapter.

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<sup>71</sup> This interpretation has been prevalent. See Ford 1988 for an overview of the efforts to remedy the unwelcome aspects of it. All of these efforts try to amend the system without challenging the interpretation of actual entities as forming the contents of the world. My solution is not so much an alternative to these (very few) attempts; it is based on dismantling the interpretation itself.

<sup>72</sup> Fetz 1981, 3.3.1.

<sup>73</sup> Bradford Wallack 1980.

<sup>74</sup> Bradley 1993, 1994.

<sup>75</sup> See esp. 3.3.

## 1.4 Categoreal Notions

In *Process and Reality*, part I, chapter II Whitehead introduces the primary notions which constitute the speculative scheme. He singles out four notions for closer attention, because they, to some extent, involve a 'divergence from antecedent philosophical thought' (PR 18). These are 'actual entity', 'prehension', 'nexus' and 'the ontological principle'.<sup>76</sup>

Philosophical thought has made for itself difficulties by dealing exclusively in very abstract notions, such as those of mere awareness, mere private sensation, mere emotion, mere purpose, mere appearance, mere causation. These are the ghosts of the old 'faculties', banished from psychology, but still haunting metaphysics. There can be no 'mere' togetherness of such abstractions. The result is that philosophical discussion is enmeshed in the fallacy of 'misplaced concreteness'. In the three notions - actual entity, prehension, nexus - an endeavour has been made to base philosophical thought upon the most concrete elements in our experience.

'Actual entities' - also termed 'actual occasions' - are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent. (PR 18)

*Actual entity* is the name for one of the most concrete elements in our experience. Also, actual entities are final facts, and drops of experience, the final real things of which the world is made up. What is the meaning of the phrase *concrete experience*?

When answering this question, it should be kept in mind that, in philosophy, there can be no safe reliance on an extra-philosophical realm of insights, revelations or knowledge - be it divine, linguistic, pragmatic or scientific which philosophy can, as it were, take for granted without including it in what it tries to understand.

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<sup>76</sup> 'Actual entity' and 'prehension' are explained in what follows; the ontological principle will return in 2.3. A nexus is a grouping of occasions. A grouping of occasions requires another occasion as the locus of its togetherness. I have not further examined this notion because it is not germane (insofar as it crucially depends on prehension) to the nature of the occasion nor to the nature of speculative elucidation.

Philosophy goes all the way down, or else it is not philosophy.<sup>77</sup> On a Whiteheadian footing, this means that the terms ‘concrete experience’ or ‘drop of experience’ are themselves part of what philosophy tries to elucidate. Therefore they cannot be used in any simple way to define the technical terms (like *occasion*, *prehension*, etc.) we then proceed to use in the construction of the philosophical system. If it were this way, there would be no need for the technical term. In other words, terms like ‘concrete experience’ and ‘drop of experience’ are themselves already philosophical.

This has drastic consequences for the activity of philosophizing. For on the one hand speculative thought can take nothing for granted - this practically defines its purpose and status<sup>78</sup> - but on the other hand, we are always already involved. Philosophy does not start from an uncontaminated, presuppositionless Archimedean point. It latches on to the interpretations of experience we already ‘perforce employ’: ‘When thought comes upon the scene, it finds the interpretations as matters of practice. Philosophy does not initiate interpretations’ (PR 14f.). It justifies or criticizes and alters them. Thus Whitehead often speaks in the language of traditional metaphysics, but by his critique of the identification of substance and logical subject he manages to avoid the pitfalls of the reification of the subject-matter of metaphysics. The very word ‘process’ points to this critique of the reifying tendency of metaphysics.<sup>79</sup> This accounts for the fact that Whitehead is often misunderstood,

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<sup>77</sup> This does not mean that philosophy can be self-reliant. It is a secondary activity, according to Whitehead, in that it is ‘limited in its sources to the world as disclosed in human experience’ (MT 71). But understanding what this means, what these words mean, and therefore understanding what experience is, and what philosophy is, is itself part of philosophy. In trying to understand ‘complete fact’ (which, naturally, includes philosophical understanding) we can only proceed ‘in terms of fundamental notions concerning the nature of reality. We are thrown back upon philosophy’ again (AI 158).

<sup>78</sup> A contemporary defender of the cause of speculative philosophy puts it like this: ‘Es besteht ein Zusammenhang zwischen dem, was unserem alltäglichen Weltverstehen und der in es eingeschlossenen Selbstverständigung seine Verfassung gibt, und den letzten Aussagen über das uns mögliche bewusste Leben. Solche Aussagen und Orientierungen werden gleichermassen von den Religionen und von der Metaphysik derjenigen Philosophie erschlossen, die im bewussten Leben selber angeeignet werden kann und somit mehr ist als seine Analyse’ (Henrich 1982, p. 99). Whitehead’s philosophy moves from everyday experience to the ‘letzten Aussagen’, and back again. The movement back to life is incorporated in the way speculative thought alters our modes of experience and enhances our awareness of the relation between experience and thought (rather than of some specific area within experience). See chapter 4.

<sup>79</sup> We can draw an analogy between the reification inherent in the notion of substance and the reification of meaning in philosophical concepts. ‘Process’ not only has an ontological meaning, but

and even more often ignored; but, when we succeed in understanding his writings, we will also have reached a possibility for reading the metaphysical tradition in a way that allows it to speak to us. Whitehead's contribution to philosophy is thus twofold: for, one, he opens up traditional metaphysics in an age dominated by scientific rationality<sup>80</sup>, and, two, he does so by taking it as seriously as possible, meaning it has to be thoroughly revised.<sup>81</sup> The process of revision is the Whiteheadian metaphysics. But it is a criticism of an interpretation already in existence, and cannot be conceived without it. Just as the occasion of experience realizes itself out of its antecedents, so does this philosophy.<sup>82</sup> To use a phrase of his own, descriptive of the transition inherent in reality but easily extended to Whitehead's own contribution to philosophy: the many become one, and are increased by one (PR 21).

To return to the notions *actual entity*, *prehension*, *nexus* and *ontological principle*: a paradigm thought for Whitehead is that nothing exists in isolation from anything. In other words, isolation is always the product of an act of abstraction, and an entity in isolation is, to use a scholastic phrase, an *ens rationis*. The relations an individual entity has to the rest of what there is are constitutive for it, and, by the principle expressed in the quote above, the entity is the realization of its relatedness.<sup>83</sup> The realization of relatedness is what Whitehead calls *experience*. But we have to

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also a semantic one. We have already seen how speculative philosophy moves in a circle of understanding. Paraphrasing Kant's well-known remark, we can say that speculative philosophy without hermeneutics is empty, and hermeneutics without speculative philosophy is blind. Whitehead once said that, in speculative philosophy, circular arguments are inevitable, but pose no problem *as long as the circle is big enough*.

<sup>80</sup> Cp. Fetz 1981, pp. 16, 264.

<sup>81</sup> This is the general tone of quite a substantial part of the secondary literature; the interpretations differ in their estimate of the nature and extent of the revision. Specific attention to Whitehead's philosophy in relation to currents in classical metaphysics is given in Leclerc 1958, 1983; Fetz *op. cit.*, *passim* and Lucas and Braeckman 1990.

<sup>82</sup> This is one of the reasons for its difficulty. Whitehead often reinterprets traditional terms in new ways. But this is of the essence of philosophy - see MT 171-174.

<sup>83</sup> So it is actually a bit sloppy to speak of something 'having' a relation to something. Just as the act requires no prior actor, so relations do not require prior relata, characterizable in abstraction from their relations. The relata are all themselves relations. The relationality of the actual entity requires that it finds antecedents which it unifies into the relational togetherness that is its own unity. In that sense antecedent relata are required. But like the present entity these are relational through and through.

distinguish carefully between his concept of experience and the common rendering of it in terms of subjective, conscious, representational awareness:

[I]n the...scheme here outlined one implicit assumption of the philosophical tradition is repudiated. The assumption is that the basic elements of experience are to be described in terms of one, or all, of the three ingredients, consciousness, thought, sense-perception. The last term is used in the sense of 'conscious perception in the mode of presentational immediacy'. Also in practice sense-perception is narrowed down to visual perception. According to the philosophy of organism these three components are unessential elements in experience. (PR 36)

Instead of these unessential elements Whitehead introduces *prehension* as a formal analysis of concrete experience. In experience we encounter an other, given in the act of experience as not reducible to the content of the experience. The object of experience is experienced as - in part - transcendent to the experience itself. *Prehension* is the name for the activity whereby an actual entity (which, then, is nothing but prehending) effects its own concretion of other actual entities (AI 176). An actual entity is only available for prehension as the completed outcome of its own concretion, or, in other words, when it has reached satisfaction. Since the act consists in the acting, its satisfaction is its perishing. Its subjective immediacy - what it is for itself - is then gone. What remains is its objectivity as an element in the concretion of other actual entities.

It is crucial not to interpret this in a mentalistic manner. The presence of one entity in another is a *real* presence, not a represented presence.<sup>84</sup> Whitehead defines prehension by reference to Leibniz:

He employed the terms 'perception' and 'apperception' for the lower and higher ways in which one monad can take account of another, namely for ways of awareness. But these terms are too closely allied to the notion of consciousness which in my doctrine is not a necessary accompaniment. Also they are all entangled in the notion of representative perception which I reject. But there is the term 'apprehension' with the meaning of 'thorough understanding'. Accordingly, on the Leibnizian model, I use the term 'prehension' for the general

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<sup>84</sup> In fact, mentality is explained in terms of real inherence of a certain kind. Whitehead quotes Descartes, from the Replies to Objections, I, with approval: 'Hence the idea of the sun will be the sun itself existing in the mind, not indeed formally, as it exists in the sky, but objectively, *i.e.*, in the way in which objects are wont to exist in the mind' (SMW 74).

way in which the occasion of experience can include, as part of its own essence, any other entity, whether another occasion of experience or an entity of another type. (AI 233-234)<sup>85</sup>

The real inherence of entities in each other can only be understood when the false idea of a finite, independent, in and for itself existing thing - a substance - is abandoned. Whitehead tries to bring this abandonment about by interpreting it as an example of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, thereby preserving both the connection with the turn toward the concrete, as well as the rationality of his own philosophy. In effect, as we saw at the beginning of this section, Whitehead states that philosophical discussion is practically rendered futile by this fallacy. A complete understanding of the status of the notions of occasion and prehension, and what comes with them, must take into account the idea of misplaced concreteness as that which these notions are meant to avoid. We think that the function these notions have is part of their meaning; they cannot be understood in isolation from it. The tragic irony, that the occasions-analysis itself comes to be an instance of misplaced concreteness, is the prime danger any interpretation of Whitehead ought to avoid.

### *1.5 Misplaced Concreteness*

We find the idea of misplaced concreteness in almost all of Whitehead's works, and in central places. Philosophy is chiefly a battle against it (PR 8). It consists in the 'accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete' (SMW 51). It is important to note its accidental character. It is not a vice necessary to intellectual apprehension, but merely a mistake, however prone we may be to committing it. In fact, it seems that if there were not an initial acquaintance with concreteness, thought could never get started. Candidates for metaphysical principles can be criticized by holding them against the light of misplaced concreteness. If we find that there are aspects of actual entities that fall outside the scope of a metaphysical hypothesis, that hypothesis is thereby shown to be misplacedly concrete, when taken as an unqualified account of concrete existence.

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<sup>85</sup> Cp. AI 176, quoted above, on 'concern' (Introduction, 4).

Whitehead held that it is impossible for philosophers finally to formulate these metaphysical first principles. This, however has got more to do with the peculiarities of formulation, than with human reason *qua* intellectual analysis (PR 4). There is an unpardonable temerity in assuming, even when this assumption is restricted to philosophy, 'that if there can be any intellectual analysis it must proceed according to some one discarded dogmatic method, and thence to deduce that intellect is intrinsically tied to erroneous fictions' (AI 223). This is not to say that outside of intellectual analysis there can be no thinking, or that the final completeness of intellectual analysis is guaranteed at the outset; it is just to state that you don't know until you've tried, and tried again.

We have already had occasion to refer to the rationalism of speculative analysis. In relation to concreteness and misplaced concreteness the rationalism of speculative analysis is chiefly safeguarded by the perspective we employ. The analysis is governed by the belief<sup>86</sup> that when we try to state the metaphysical principles as well as we can, we shall not in the end find that there is a basic incoherence among the principles exhibitiv of concreteness. Irrationalism is incoherence of principles. The belief of rationalism is a major source of criticism, for it summons us to discard those analyses that are lacking in coherence. Misplaced concreteness is simply a form of incoherence, for accepting a set of metaphysical principles while at the same time having to acknowledge the existence of aspects of concrete existence uncovered by it, is surely incoherent. A clear, and for Whitehead's philosophy, germane example of misplaced concreteness is the philosophical interpretation of the materialism of modern science.

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<sup>86</sup> Whitehead explicitly speaks of 'faith' in this connection:

That we fail to find in experience any elements intrinsically incapable of exhibition as examples of general theory is the hope of rationalism. This hope is not a metaphysical premise. It is the faith which forms the motive for the pursuit of all sciences alike, including metaphysics. (PR 42)

On PR 9 we find another formulation of the hypothetical character of rationalism: 'Rationalism never shakes off its status of an experimental adventure.' The ideal of rationalism guides philosophy as a final goal.

We find his discussion in *Science and the Modern World*, pp. 50-55. Whitehead begins by explaining the scientific scheme of the seventeenth century. It presents nature as a 'succession of instantaneous configurations of matter'. Since the forces of nature, such as gravitation, are determined entirely by these configurations, the configurations determine their own changes, and the circle of scientific thought is closed. This is the mechanistic theory of nature. Despite philosophical difficulties it quickly became the 'orthodox creed of physical theory' (50), because it works tremendously well.

But an insurmountable problem arises when we ask in what sense, according to seventeenth-century science, perceptible qualities, such as blueness, noisiness or scent (so-called *qualia*), are qualities of the bodies we perceive. There is no room for these qualities in nature:

Galileo considered this question, and at once pointed out that, apart from eyes, ears, or noses, there would be no colours, sounds, or smells. . . . The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly. However you disguise it, this is the practical outcome of the characteristic scientific philosophy which closed the seventeenth century. . . . It has held its own as the guiding principle of scientific studies ever since. It is still reigning. Every university in the world organises itself in accordance with it. No alternative system of organising the pursuit of scientific truth has been suggested. It is not only reigning, but it is without a rival. (SMW 53-54)

But, Whitehead continues, the result remains very unsatisfactory. Surely, he says, it is 'framed in terms of high abstractions', leading to the paradoxes mentioned 'because we have mistaken our abstraction for concrete realities' (54f.). Yet the enormous success of the scheme bifurcating nature into 'on the one hand *matter* with its *simple location* in space and time, on the other hand *mind*, perceiving, suffering, reasoning, but not interfering,' forced upon philosophy the task of accepting the bifurcation as 'the most concrete rendering of fact' (55). This has ruined philosophy and deprived it of relevance to ordinary, daily experience. For the ensuing 'juggling with abstractions' (55) could not remedy the confusion that was brought into



philosophy by a misplacedly concrete interpretation of the basic notions structuring early modern science.

Instead of accepting the two sides as independently conceivable and then trying to get them together, or trying to reduce one to the other, philosophy should turn its attention to the experiential basis of the bifurcation. Then it will appear, or so Whitehead found, that the two sides are inherent in the act of experience as we find it. And experience being all we have, we can easily see how both sides each highlight different aspects of the concrete, integrated act. There is no need to deny the accuracy of physical science nor, for example, to deny the existence of elementary particles, but we do find the field of concrete existence as encompassing the field of physics, as indeed the other sciences. The characterization of the concrete field of existence, including the fact that it allows for something like science, now becomes the proper task of speculative philosophy. And because what we are concerned with applies to anything empirical science or human experience establishes as real, we can say that our investigation is completely general and does not interfere with empirical investigation, although it does use it (for any and all experience is what it tries to interpret from this general standpoint) and it can influence empirical investigation in some ways by giving glimpses of 'what it all comes to'.<sup>87</sup>

Now, returning to the question raised above, about the relation between the rationalism of speculative analysis and misplaced concreteness we can make the following observation: a speculative scheme (i.e. an interpretation of experience that is universally adequate) is misplacedly concrete when it ignores certain aspects of actualities (PR 8). In terms of the demands imposed on schematic analysis, 'ignoring' certain aspects comes down to failing to provide part of experience with a coherent embedding in the scheme. Since 'coherence is the great preservative of rationalistic sanity' (PR 6), since, in other words, coherence is the specific characteristic of rationalism, we can say that the procedure of avoiding misplaced concreteness is the guiding principle of rationalism and the main source of rationalistic criticism of proposed schemes of speculative interpretation. But rationalism has thus been tied

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<sup>87</sup> AE 123.

intrinsically to the attempt to express the whole of experience in terms of a set of coherently related and mutually elucidating notions which cannot be reduced to other, more fundamental notions. It is no longer to be identified with deductive reasoning from clear and distinct premises.<sup>88</sup>

### *1.6 Scheme and Interpretation*

The speculative metaphysics proceeds by avoiding misplaced concreteness in the framing of schemes interpretative of experience. We have said something about misplaced concreteness, and have also introduced the notions of *scheme* and *interpretation*. These words are philosophically very complex. Therefore their meaning has to be considered in more detail.

*Process and Reality* begins with a short statement of the categoreal scheme, and proceeds to illuminate and clarify it by various discussions and applications, which occupy the remaining ninety percent of the text.

The scheme consists of four types of categories: the category of the ultimate, containing the notion of creativity which is the most general characterization of act as a 'many becoming one'; the categories of existence; the categories of explanation governing the analysis of the act of becoming; and the so-called 'categoreal obligations' laid on prehension. They receive their function from being oriented towards what Whitehead calls 'the empirical side' (PR 3) of the analysis. The empirical side is everything of which we are conscious as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought (PR 3). The empirical includes every element of our experience: daily life with everything in it, God and value, art and politics, science, technology and history. Thus the empirical is not a mere given, itself devoid of conceptual structure. There is a given, but it is already interpreted and formed.

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<sup>88</sup> For '[i]t will be observed that logical notions must themselves find their places in the scheme of philosophic notions' (PR 3). This does not imply that we do not have these logical notions (to some extent at least) at our disposal when we start to frame a scheme. In this respect logic is not different from other interpretations of experience we already, perforce, employ when speculative metaphysics arrives on the scene.

Now, the construction of a philosophical scheme of general categories is an enterprise in 'imaginative generalization' (PR 5). We find the general features of the empirical world not by starting with the particular elements of experience, only to use them in a theoretical, explanatory model, reducing the general features to the effects of the workings of these particular features, but by employing *analogically*<sup>89</sup> particular features for the characterization of general features. Whitehead describes it as 'the utilization of specific notions, applying to a restricted group of facts, for the divination of the generic notions which apply to all facts' (PR 5). For example, the notion of actual entity, a 'drop of experience', is at first best conceived of as a particular experience of a particular human person. This is a particular familiar feature of the empirical. Then we start generalizing, to cover other areas of the empirical as well, trying to retain the required universality of the notion, all the while using the scheme we were perforce employing (there is no position outside it). It may clear things up further to remark that the philosophical *term occasion*, or *actual entity* is of course not that with which we begin. We happen to find ourselves in a historical position where subjective human experience is available as a starting point for the divination of generic notions applying to all facts. It is a long way from

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<sup>89</sup> 'The procedure of rationalism is the discussion of analogy.' The ground of analogy lies in the nature of *form*. Leclerc (1961b) explains this by pointing out that in the procedure of generalizing particular features of experience to cover all experience, or experience as such, 'we are endeavouring to attain a comprehension of a generic form determinative of the essence of one entity, by recognizing that form in a specific illustration in some other entity' (p. 203). Leclerc distinguishes this form of analogy of illustration from the Aristotelian analogy of proportion. The analogy of illustration is concerned with seeing *the same form as illustrated in different ways*. But since it lies in the nature of form to be only graspable as manifested in experience, the bare form itself is beyond reach - it is a mere possibility (PR 22, 184, 188). Thus the generalizing activity is an imaginary effort to grasp generality by analogy of illustration. Our comprehension of forms remains partial and incomplete; we do not know what, for example, green can be capable of under other conditions of experience than those which in fact obtain:

[W]e know about the colour *green* in some of its perspectives. But what green is capable of in other epochs of the universe, when other laws of nature are reigning, is beyond our present imaginations. And yet there is nothing intrinsically impossible in the notion that, as years pass, mankind may gain an imaginative insight into some alternative possibility of nature, and may therefore gain understanding of the possibilities of green in other imagined epochs. (MT 42f.)

(Note that Whitehead held that the laws of nature may change. This topic is of no immediate interest to the present study; suffice it to remark that Whitehead is in line in this with the pragmatists, most notably Peirce. See AI, ch. VII.)

awareness of a private experience to the articulate scheme of which ‘actual entity’ is part, but there *is* a way. Whitehead likens the procedure of schematic construction to the flight of an airplane:

The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation. (PR 5)

It is important to note that the distinction of scheme and experience is not to be conflated with a distinction between mind and world, or knowing subject and object known, taken as ultimate philosophical notions. For the notion of schematization dissolves the thought that there can be *any* such fixed, privileged starting points. The distinctions mentioned are simply analogously employed, familiar particular features of experience.<sup>90</sup> There is an ideal, a scheme of principles, and the construction of it can only proceed by generalizing according to the criteria of schematic analysis (universality, necessity<sup>91</sup>) from particular experience.

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<sup>90</sup> See Bradley 1991, p. 137. Bradley further points out, and we completely agree, that ‘the method of schematization further emancipates the investigation both from the assumption that there is a “complete” or “realized” real, understood as something given in itself, which awaits characterization, and equally from its twin; namely, that if there is no thing-in-itself, the “real” can be nothing other than a concatenation of historically changing perspectives....’ The distinction between things in themselves and perspectives is not ultimate for schematic analysis as Whitehead conceives it, but reappears as an interpretation of such manifest features of the world as reliability and givenness and difference of circumstance, taken in a broad sense. These manifest features can ‘be considered without conflation with the mesmerizing polarity of the thing-in-itself and its subjectivist counterpart’ (*ib.*).

<sup>91</sup> Whitehead defines the adequacy of the scheme as the scheme’s necessity and universality. He defines these as follows:

[T]he philosophic scheme should be ‘necessary’, in the sense of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates with immediate matter of fact. But what does not so communicate is unknowable, and the unknowable is unknown (fn.: This doctrine is a paradox. Indulging in a species of false modesty, ‘cautious’ philosophers undertake its definition.); and so this universality defined by ‘communication’ can suffice. (PR 4)

Since the framing of philosophical schemes proceeds by imaginative generalization from experience, there is no a priori intuition about necessity in the sense of ‘bearing its own warrant of universality throughout all experience’. I think it is in line with Whitehead’s methodology to see the warrant, not as a mysterious quality attaching to some propositions, but as a regulative notion, much like ‘misplaced concreteness’ (cp. previous section). The demand that our metaphysics be necessary is the warrant of universality. It offers a criterion for the assessment and adaptation of schemes. Thus

Also it should be noted that a scheme is always a working hypothesis, always in the making. This is so simply because experience teaches us that things change. Change is a manifest feature of the empirical. In other words: a fixed criterion outside all interpretation by which to measure finality is, on account of the definition of the empirical here employed, as always interpreted, not only a meaningless notion, but an unnecessary one as well.

Whitehead's metaphysical works are themselves illustrative of the method here outlined. For the speculative use he makes of the algebraic method and of the concept of function as an account of metaphysical method, is itself an analogue with hypothetical status in respect of its subject matter.<sup>92</sup> Also, Whitehead's own philosophical development illustrates the 'airplane method', therefore I will say a word or two about it here.<sup>93</sup>

His turn to metaphysics, commencing with *Science and the Modern World*, came as a surprise, indeed an unwelcome surprise, for the majority of English-speaking philosophers, and in particular to his colleagues in the Harvard philosophy

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Rorty's criticism (against Whitehead's student Hartshorne) of the notion of a necessary truth as one compatible with any conceivable experience, namely that we do not have the slightest idea what is and what is not a conceivable experience (Rorty 1995b, p. 35f.), misses the point. Whitehead would agree completely that we have no idea what is and what is not a conceivable experience, but that in no way debilitates the construction of general schemes.

Closely connected with the notions of necessity and universality is the notion of self-evidence, which is crucial for Whitehead. It seems that there can be no a priori dismissal of the possibility of a necessary and self-evident truth (and some would say the principle of identity qualifies as one), but for Whitehead an a priori acceptance of necessary and self-evident truths is at least as problematic as metaphysical finality in general: 'Understanding is self-evidence. But our clarity of intuition is limited, and it flickers' (MT 50). Be this as it may, in the light of the independently argued relation between logic and metaphysics (see 3.2), it is of little direct consequence for metaphysical procedure.

<sup>92</sup> Analogues have their limits. We have seen the limits of the function as an analogue, and also algebraic method has its limits. Mathematics is 'the study of pattern in abstraction from the particulars which are patterned' (ESP 111) while speculative metaphysics is not only concerned with connection, but with particularity as well.

<sup>93</sup> The line of development sketched here is fairly uncontested. I rely on Leclerc 1958, ch. 1. There is an abundant literature on Whitehead's philosophical development. See especially Lawrence 1956, Ford 1984 and Munnik 1987, for detailed analysis and further references.

department, which he had been invited to join at the age of 63 after publishing his *Principles of Natural Knowledge*.<sup>94</sup>

But from the point of view of the development of Whitehead's thinking, there is no rupture or fundamental shift in perspective between the earlier work in the philosophy of physics and the later work in metaphysics.<sup>95</sup> This is so because (1) when reading the earlier work in retrospect we can see the relation between philosophical thinking and other modes of thought, such as science, as one consisting of, on the one hand interpretation (the metaphysics offers an interpretation of the earlier work), and on the other schematic generalization (the metaphysical scheme is, in part at least, arrived at through imaginative generalization on the basis of the earlier work). This relation is important because it shows the unity in the effort intellectually to grasp the world at work. And (2) there is a clear and precise *reason*, present in the earlier work, for venturing out into the field of metaphysics. This can be explained as follows. In *The Concept of Nature* and *The Principles of Natural Knowledge* Whitehead had been engaged in developing a new conceptual framework for understanding nature which would have to be able to accommodate the recent developments in physics and overcome the already introduced bifurcation of nature and mind. This he tried to do by discarding the Newtonian conception of matter in motion in an absolute, fixed, dimensional pattern of space and time, and developing instead an account of nature in terms of events, whose basic characteristic was extensiveness. He elaborated his theory in great technical detail, but we shall not go into that here. What is important for us is the incompleteness of the enterprise, an incompleteness Whitehead in effect explicitly acknowledged in a well-known appendix to the second edition of *The Principles of Natural Knowledge*:

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<sup>94</sup> The sentiments of some are expressed nicely in the following quote from A.E. Murphy (1929, p. 295): 'It would not be surprising if an adherent of a contemporary philosophical school such as personalism which traditionally and professionally finds sermons in stones and Methodism in scientific methodology were to talk . . . as Whitehead does; but we had hoped something else than this revival of a hoary and non-empirical eternalism from the author of *The Principles of Natural Knowledge*.'

<sup>95</sup> Leclerc (1958, p. 11) speaks of the 'embodiment' of the earlier work in the later. The need for this embodiment resulted from the inner dynamics of the earlier works themselves. See Leclerc 1983, p. 53.

The book is dominated by the idea that the relation of extension has a unique preeminence and that everything can be got out of it. During the development of the theme, it gradually became evident that this is not the case. . . . But the true doctrine, that 'process' is the fundamental idea, was not in my mind with sufficient emphasis. Extension is derivative from process, and is required by it. (PNK 202)

Whitehead realized that his earlier account of events solely couched in terms of extension remained too abstract - it discussed only a relatively abstract aspect of events - to bear the burden of showing the prehensive character of space-time, as opposed to the classical theory of the separative character of space-time (SMW 64). So he moved to an expanded conception of the nature of events in terms of *processes of unification*. For what was missing was due acknowledgement of events as *happenings*. The event is the unit of things real, and this unit is a process of realization and therefore unification.<sup>96</sup> However, we still have not reached the level of metaphysics, because this newly expanded conception, which indeed allows us to develop in more detail the concept of event to replace the concept of simply located matter, hinges on an inarticulate, presupposed understanding of the notions of *unity*, *unification*, *happening* as affording an account of concrete existence. In order to render these notions and their abstract use in the sciences fully clear, we have to develop an adequate understanding of the nature of concrete fact.<sup>97</sup> We have to develop a way of thinking about reality which leaves nothing out. This comes down to answering the question: what is 'the fact of the reality of an event in itself' (SMW 93)?

But this is no longer a strictly scientific, or theoretical question. It is the question as to the nature of actual existence as such, i.e. without abstracting from any of its characteristics.<sup>98</sup> For read carefully: the question is not, at first, about events, nor about the reality of events, but about the fact of the reality of an event. This Whitehead terms a '*complete fact*' (AI 158), precisely because it does *not abstract from anything*. The endeavour to understand what a complete fact is, is called metaphysics. It should be noted that not abstracting from anything includes not

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<sup>96</sup> An entity is always a unity (PR 21).

<sup>97</sup> Whitehead often uses the word 'fact' (or 'concrete fact') to indicate reality as fully concrete. This use should not be conflated with the common meaning of the word 'fact' (state of affairs). See Leclerc 1958, p. 19f.

<sup>98</sup> Whereas science out of the nature of the case *does* abstract. See Introduction, 5.

abstracting from thought or knowledge. Thought and knowledge (and with these philosophy) themselves have to be able to be interpreted in terms of the scheme expressive of concreteness.

In *The Concept of Nature*, so even before the publication of the first metaphysical work (*Science and the Modern World*) we find a clear awareness of this point in the distinction between *homogeneous* and *heterogeneous* thought. Nature, Whitehead says, is that which we observe in perception through the senses. In sense-perception we are aware of something which 'is not thought, and is self-contained for thought', meaning it can be 'thought of as a closed system whose mutual relations do not require the expression of the fact that they are thought about' (CN 3). Thinking about nature without thinking about thought is homogeneous thinking about nature. Natural science is a form of homogeneous thinking about nature. If we think about nature in relation to the fact that nature is thought about, we are thinking heterogeneously about nature. A full metaphysical account of the whole of experience (meaning: including sense-perception with nature as disclosed through it, thought, and thought about nature) is necessarily heterogeneous as far as its interpretation of sense-perception, nature and thought is concerned. It deals with these topics in their conjunction. But a full metaphysical account should do more than that. For it cannot avoid taking into account the fact of heterogeneous thought about sense-perception, nature, thought, and thought about nature. Thus we can say that speculative philosophy is homogeneous thought about heterogeneous thought. The heterogeneous account of nature in conjunction with thought about nature we can call the reflective dimension of metaphysics (for thought here takes itself into account); in the homogeneous consideration of this heterogeneous account an extra dimension is added to reflection, namely the self-explicative account of the fundamental notions involved in the heterogeneous account. This self-explicative account is homogeneous because there is no further aspect or dimension of experience located outside it from which it can be approached. And precisely because there is no 'outside' to this most fundamental dimension of speculative philosophy from which thought could enter its domains, we conclude that thought always already moves within its sphere, though with dim or even virtually non-existent awareness of its structure.



Now we can see that the starting point, the foundations of physical theory, is in a way immaterial to the area of questioning opened up. We could just as well have started somewhere else<sup>99</sup>, because what we have done is find out that our initial theoretical starting point is involved in abstractions, in models of thought, which presuppose what we might call 'concreteness'. The turn to the endeavour to frame an understanding of concreteness (amounting in process thought to an account of 'concrecence', i.e. the act of becoming concrete), is a turn away from science, since understanding concreteness has nothing to do with assigning hidden causes which are more real than what they cause (here: concrete experience), or pointing out abstract factors which somehow are supposed together to make up concreteness. Those moves would be attempts to think heterogeneously about what can only be thought of homogeneously.

Here, I think, lies the point where Whitehead makes contact with the notion of a metaphysical principle as understood in classical philosophy. For, what are we doing when we speak about a complete fact, a concrete entity, and develop accounts of its constitutive elements and structure? I think Lonergan gives the answer in a very clear passage, which is a helpful gloss on what we have been saying about Whiteheadian metaphysical methodology.<sup>100</sup> Therefore I quote the passage in full:

[T]here is a profound difference between discourse about horses and dogs and discourse about potency, form and act; for from the former [through imaginative generalization] one arrives at constituent potencies, forms, and acts [or some other set of metaphysical elements]; but from the latter one cannot legitimately proceed to a repetition of the analysis with respect to the elements themselves. It is this difference that is expressed in traditional metaphysics when it is affirmed that, while horses and dogs exist and change, potency, form, and act are, not what exists or changes, but that by which are constituted the beings that exist and change [all existing things; not just the horse, but also its cells].

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<sup>99</sup> And indeed, in SMW, ch. IX, Whitehead arrives at the same metaphysical position through a discussion of psychology, and explicitly states the equivalence of physics and psychology in the process of reaching the metaphysical question. See SMW 152.

<sup>100</sup> I use this quote in order to communicate a point about the question occupying me here, how to understand Whitehead. I am not concerned with determining the relative positions of Whitehead and (neo)Thomist philosophy.

There remain the difficulties of the imagination. As we employ sensible names such as potency and form and act, so too we are helped by imagining these constituents of concrete being; and as the images represent the objects, so they give rise to problems about the objects; but it is essential to grasp that such images are merely symbolic and that such problems commonly are to be met by denying their suppositions. For on the one hand, potency, form, and act are not the explanation of anything but the general structure in which occurs the explanation of any proportionate [i.e. empirical] being. On the other hand - and this is the more fundamental point - explaining and explained do not lie within the field of the imaginable, but imaginable and imagining lie within the field of explaining and explained.<sup>101</sup>

The constitutive character of the metaphysical elements is not in any way causally responsible for concrete being. It is not as though they are more real, or more concrete, than concrete being, and together somehow make up the individual horse or dog. They are not metaphysical underpinnings. But granted this, the question as to the status of the metaphysical elements, or principles, is not yet completely answered. For if constitution is not to be taken in a productive sense (in terms of the quotation: if it is not to be taken as constitution in the sense in which we can talk about horses and dogs as consisting of bones, organic tissue, modes of functioning etc.<sup>102</sup>), if concrete being is not the sum of the elements, we have to ask what then the

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<sup>101</sup> Lonergan 1957, p. 536.

<sup>102</sup> The realist interpretation holds that the actual entity is indeed a kind of constituent basic entity, like a cell or an elementary particle, only, an event-like particle (of the nature of an act of experience) instead of a thing-like particle. As a consequence it also holds that a medium-sized particular (a horse or a dog) has no real existence except as qualifying (sets of) elementary events. Thus it would have to say that the metaphysical notions potency, form and act (to stick to the three mentioned in the quotation) are not the potency, form and act of the horse or dog, but of the actual entities of which the horse or the dog is the qualification. The result is that the actual entity is, again, simply a substance - for potency, form and act define the metaphysical constitution of substances. In our interpretation, 'actual entity' is an alternative to 'substance' and it brings with it an alternative to the explication of substance in terms of potency, form and act (the actual entity is analysed in terms of 'many becoming one'). On PR 21 Whitehead says that the 'category of the ultimate', which explicates the ultimate notions involved in the notion of a 'being' or 'entity' (creativity, togetherness, many, one) 'replaces Aristotle's category of "primary substance"'. We think that in the end the realist interpretation reads this perhaps too much as implying that the category of the ultimate is Whitehead's explication of 'primary substance', whereas our interpretation claims that with the category of the ultimate the category primary substance itself disappears (with all the consequences for the other categories and for the notion of a category itself). While this involves that we now have to cease to speak of horses and dogs as the paradigm examples of concrete being (in that sense the realist interpretation is correct in maintaining that the metaphysical scheme has ontic consequences) it does not mean that the 'profound difference' between discourse about horses and discourse about acts Lonergan talks about is simply dismissed (and still less that we can afford simply to ignore it). It is only when we see that Whitehead's notion of an actual entity self-consciously relativizes the distinction between the

relation of concrete being to the elements is.<sup>103</sup> In other words, what are metaphysical principles? What interpretation can we provide of the scheme itself? In the introduction we noted that Whitehead doesn't seem to set much stock by the words 'notion', 'idea', 'concept', 'form' or 'principle'. He appears to be using them loosely and largely choosing one over the other in specific contexts on associative grounds. Nowhere does he explain precisely what these words mean in his philosophy.<sup>104</sup> Yet for an understanding of what metaphysical principles are, and consequently of what metaphysical understanding is, that would seem to be

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categoreal (or formal) and the real (because the actual entity is nothing but the realization of its own determinateness, its own form) that Whitehead's realism with respect to actual entities ('actual entities ... are the final real things of which the world is made up' (PR 18)) can be understood. See 2.3.4.

<sup>103</sup> Bringing in the notion of a *relation* between concrete being and the metaphysical elements may seem to be a case of treating them as some sort of objects (cp. the quotation). But just as we could deny the supposition if imagining them as objects were our problem, so we can insist on some sort of explanation, unimaginable maybe, of the relation.

<sup>104</sup> All ideality is in last instance a matter of 'eternal objects', i.e. forms of definiteness of occasions. Even the subjective form of an occasion, which is 'how' the occasion experiences (consciousness, judgement etc. fall under this category) is in the end described as 'a mode of ingression of eternal objects in the occasion' (PR 86 - 'ingression' is the word Whitehead uses to designate the way in which an eternal object is a factor of an occasion). With Spaemann (1990, p. 163f.) we might say that this means Whitehead can understand reason only 'as a function of organic creativity, and not as the free coming-to-itself of creativity'. This would then mean that the speculative scheme 'does not permit the conditions that constitute the possibility of its own endeavour to be categorically interpreted in its turn'. This criticism is just the other side of the realist interpretation of the actual entity. Spaemann explains the 'free coming-to-itself of creativity' in the following way:

It is only that free act of recognition which is adequately expressed by the word 'being', and hence it is only the 'absolute positing' carried out by a judgement, which locates what has been prehended and is now known where it had initially been. Only in this act of acknowledgement does the subject take back its sensible apprehension of the other and realize that, for its part, it is apprehended by the other in a similar way, so that it is, or is part of, the other's environment. Only by this act of letting-be (*Seinlassen*), the subject constitutes itself as properly being. Such thoughts, however, cannot be conceived within Whiteheadian concepts. (*ib.*)

But surely they can! For we must not, as Spaemann covertly does, identify 'prehension' with sensible apprehension. 'Letting-be' in the sense of recognizing the other as other, and realizing that I am in the other's environment is simply a form of prehension. And moreover, in prehension the other *is always present as other*. That defines prehension (see 1.4). There can be conscious realization of it (in the case of the individual human being who comes to see himself as a subject amid others through a social process of mutual acknowledgement), or there may not be. It is only when we secretly think of the occasion as a substance (and hence of the presence in the occasion of an other as necessarily only a representation) that over and above sensible apprehension we need a judgement to safeguard the otherness of the other. But Whitehead's notion of experience (and hence his notion of the 'organic') is from the start committed to the idea of the real inclusion of others in the actual occasion. Organic creativity carries the free coming-to-itself of creativity in it, completely and by right.

necessary. This criticism, however, overlooks the fact that all these terms are brought under one heading in the notion of *eternal object*. Like the actual entity, the eternal object is usually represented<sup>105</sup> as a type of entity in the world, a subsistent form of definiteness, committing Whitehead to an almost crude form of Platonism. Yet Whitehead makes it perfectly clear that forms are not to be found in the world. In one place he quotes Wordsworth's line 'the light that never was, on sea or land' to stress this point (SMW 87). Like act, form of definiteness itself is a metaphysical element, in the Lonergian sense.<sup>106</sup> The question how principles can exhibit concrete

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<sup>105</sup> For example Polls 1967, chapters 5 and 6, and Hall (1963), who sharply criticizes Whitehead for introducing eternal objects as a 'group of real entities' (p. 115), which is not quite what they are. Cp. next footnote.

<sup>106</sup> MT 69:

The notion of the numbers up to six, as existing in a vacuum, is idiotic. The muddiness is referent to mud, and forms of evil require evil things, in some sense or other. Thus the forms are essentially referent beyond themselves. It is mere phantasy to impute to them any 'absolute reality', which is devoid of implications beyond itself. The realm of forms is the realm of potentiality, and the very notion of potentiality has an external meaning. It refers to life and motion. It refers to inclusion and exclusion. It refers to hope, fear, and intention. Phrasing this statement more generally, - it refers to appetition. It refers to the development of actuality, which realizes form and is yet more than form. It refers to past, present, and future.

Cp. also a short but telling remark in a letter to Hartshorne, dated 2 January 1936 (in Kline 1963, p. 199):

There is one point as to which you - and everyone - misconstrue me - obviously my usual faults of exposition are to blame. I mean my doctrine of *eternal objects*. It is a first endeavour to get beyond the absurd simple-mindedness of the traditional treatment of Universals. . . . The points to notice are . . . (iii) that no eternal object in any finite realization can exhibit the full potentialities of its nature . . . [and that] (v) [t]he simple-minded way in which traditional philosophy - e.g. Hume, Bradley, etc. - has treated universals is the root of all evils. This is the great merit of the '*Gestalt*' people.

The connection with the notion of a '*Gestalt*' should warn us off an easy imputation of Platonism. Occasions are intrinsically characterized, that is all that the notion of eternal object signifies. In the elaboration of the theory of eternal objects (SMW, ch. X; PR II, I and *passim*) Whitehead has made a beginning with a less 'simple-minded' theory of universals than he felt traditional philosophy offered. Thus we find a description of forms as possessing an 'individual essence', which is the form as what it is, and a 'relational essence' which is the infinitude of modes of realization it has through 'mingling' with other forms (ESP 98) - this, I think, is what Whitehead was thinking of when he referred to the notion of a *Gestalt*. The theory of forms is less an exercise in platonic ontology than a *description* of the formal aspects of actual entities - of the fact that green is green, but that there is also mint green, and even cold and warm green. It has been remarked by Leclerc (1961b) that the structure of the 'realm of forms' (no platonism intended!) can be reduced to the genus-species form of relation, whereby there are generic forms existing in specific illustrations (e.g. 'green' as a generic form and the different shades of green as its specific instances). The whole 'realm' of forms - and this is the only reason for speaking of a 'realm' - is connected by the genus-species relation (thus green is a species of quality, and the specific shades are all forms of colour) and constitutes a continuum of possibilities for

existence can now be seen to be a question about the interdependence of two metaphysical elements, act and form, rather than about form and the concrete being as an empirical given. A further analysis of that interdependence will have to refer to the coherence of the notions of the scheme, a theme to which we will return explicitly in chapter 2.

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determinateness which is atomized, and actualized, by the realization in an occasion of a determinate cross-section of the realm - as in 'the green over there on the wall'. Thus, while the language is platonic, the status of the theory is rather that of a 'phenomenology of form' (where the word phenomenology should be taken in a loose sense).

A last textual back-up we find in a set of as yet unpublished lecture notes taken by Dorothy Emmet in 1928-1929:

Notion of universal that of potentiality. A form of definiteness for actualities. I apprehend blueness as realized in a coat and as possible elsewhere. If you say that blueness subsists apart from all actuality, you have an extreme realism. Whitehead's doctrine conceptualism, i.e. all efficacy derived from actuality. Relevance of universals a conceptual realism.

Here we find Whitehead's position explained as a form of conceptualism. That, of course, is only a preliminary explanation because the notion of a 'concept' is explained by the theory of eternal objects, not the other way around. (This passage was taken from the first - undated - lecture, immediately followed by a lecture dated 4 December 1928. It seems reasonable to suppose that this first lecture was delivered sometime the week before, because the rest of the lectures were delivered twice a week. I thank dr. James Bradley for kindly putting these notes at my disposal.)

## 2 Speculative Philosophy

The necessities are invariable, and for that reason remain in the background of thought, dimly and vaguely. Thus philosophic truth is to be sought in the presuppositions of language rather than in its express statements. For this reason philosophy is akin to poetry. (*Modes of Thought*, vii)

### 2.1 System and Speculative Philosophy

In this chapter we push our consideration of the nature of speculative philosophy a bit further. The demand of self-referential consistency will be traced in its ramifications for speculative method. Towards the end of the chapter we will have reached a position where the distinction between the form of the theory and its content, and with that the concept of *method*, will have to be qualified. For understanding what speculative thinking is involves understanding that it consists in a movement of thought in which in a way method is transcended, in which our usual understanding of method is radically redefined. To explain: A method is a 'way of dealing with data' (AI 223). It is confined to certain established practices and premises which outline the method. Reason limited to a method 'works in the secure daylight of traditional practical activity' (FR 66). But the question of speculative metaphysics about the ultimate generalities inherent in experience involves the questioning of the methods. It is the effort to understand limited reason, and with that, limited method, as 'coordinated in a nature of things only to be grasped by transcending all method' (FR 65). But this 'nature of things' is nothing else than what a speculative metaphysics seeks to bring to light - in other words: its contents. It is only in terms of 'the nature of things' that we can understand what it means to transcend method; thus the form of speculative thinking is clarified by its content.

But this in no way means speculative thinking proceeds haphazardly. For the demands that secure the rationalism of speculative thought (coherence, avoidance of misplaced concreteness) still hold. They are not 'methodical' in the sense of offering

a limited procedure for the interpretation of facts.<sup>107</sup> It will turn out once we have established what the precise nature of speculative thinking is, that the form of this type of thought, and its content (in the case of Whitehead, the occasions-analysis of actuality) merge. We will then understand the essence of the occasions-analysis of actual existence.

We begin by noting that the term ‘speculative philosophy’, often associated with *speculum*, mirror<sup>108</sup>, was a common name for philosophical enquiries dealing in a conjectural rather than inferential way with the larger generalities of human life, nature, history or reality in Anglo-American philosophy from the early nineteenth century, when Hegel’s influence began to be felt in England, well until the second or even third decade of this century. Also we find the word already in Hume, in his

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<sup>107</sup> To be sure, Whitehead is not consistent in his qualification of the word *method*. He will simply speak of ‘speculative method’ (e.g. in PR, I, I and AI, ch. XV) and only in FR, ch. 3, is there the explicit distinction between the ‘speculative’ and the ‘methodical’ use of reason. Since FR was written in 1929 (it comprises a set of Princeton lectures delivered in March 1929), so between PR (Gifford lectures, 1927-1928) and AI (1933), and since there are no obvious divergences of position between the three as far as the purpose of speculative thinking is concerned, we take it that also from the point of view of PR and AI we can agree with the analysis of FR. We too continue to speak of ‘speculative method’, as indeed we do in the title of this study, but it should always be understood against the background of the foregoing.

Let us also remark at this point that Whitehead’s often discussed habit of coining neologisms for basic notions in his philosophy is consistent with what we have been saying about method. In the movement of transcending methods, using words with a fixed meaning can be dangerous. Speculative thought is essentially an advance beyond what is already known (cp. the function of imaginative generalization) and will accordingly find it impossible to ‘confine itself to the dictionary’; it seeks to ‘enlarge the dictionary’ (MT, part IV). Whitehead never gets tired of stating that because of this, speculative thought is one of the great factors in the growth of knowledge, and a distrust of speculative thinking is a threat to the advance of civilization. E.g. MT 174:

The use of philosophy is to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system. It reverses the slow descent of accepted thought towards the inactive commonplace. If you like to phrase it so, philosophy is mystical. For mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unspoken. But the purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism: not by explaining it away, but by the introduction of novel verbal characterizations, rationally coordinated. Philosophy is akin to poetry, and both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization. In each case there is reference to form beyond the direct meanings of words.

<sup>108</sup> The history of the word ‘speculation’ is described in Ebbersmeyer 1995. The word derives from lat. *speculari*, to look around, *specula*, vantage point, but the link with *speculum*, mirror, has been the more common since late antiquity, designating a form of knowledge of God in which mind and matter are seen as mirroring God (*op. cit.*, p. 1355). In view of Whitehead’s critique of representational epistemology and his definition of speculative philosophy as an interpretation of the whole of experience, we may say that the derivation from *specula* is the more insightful one in a discussion of Whitehead’s speculative method. We will briefly return to the connection with ‘mirror’ below.

crusade against ‘abstruse speculation’. We don’t think Whitehead set too much stock by the word, as was quite common among Anglo-American philosophers of that time.<sup>109</sup> But Whitehead was very much aware of the distinctive nature of speculative thinking and from what has been said in the previous chapter follows that we cannot avoid the task of stating as explicitly as possible what is involved in it.

The preface to *Process and Reality* lists a number of ‘habits of thought’, as Whitehead calls them, which he rejects as far as their influence on philosophy is concerned. The first of these is the distrust of speculative philosophy (PR xiii). At one with this is the first chapter of the book, in which speculative philosophy is defined and in which it is argued that it is ‘a method productive of important knowledge’ (PR 3).

Speculative thinking, we have seen, tries to frame a system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted. The scheme should be consistent, necessary in the sense of warranting its own universality throughout experience, and coherent. This statement introduces a lot of words whose precise meaning cannot be clear at the outset - in fact, as we have seen before, they are not employed as technical terms here, but serve as stepping stones into philosophy, taken from everyday language and awaiting an elucidation in terms of the philosophy that will be developed on the basis of this starting point in everyday language. It is unclear how there could be another start in philosophy.<sup>110</sup> We never start to think from scratch, we are always already thinking, using words and entertaining truths and falsehoods, just as we are always already living when the possibility of thought dawns upon us. This is a statement of fact and its own factuality indicates that its conditions of possibility, the conditions of possibility of

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<sup>109</sup> The *American Journal of Speculative Philosophy* published articles ranging from metaphysics to ethics and philosophy of culture.

<sup>110</sup> That is, from what we have been saying about Whitehead. In this context a comparison with what other philosophers have had to say about beginning to philosophize (Descartes, Kant, Hegel) would be very interesting but because of the complexity of this issue - its intrinsic relatedness to the respective concepts of experience and thought, for example - we must leave this question for further consideration. An analysis would lead us too far afield.



an expression of what is the case, in fact obtain. There is a way things are<sup>111</sup>, and there is a possibility of thinking about that - thinking better or poorer, at least.

‘Interpretation’ here means that everything of which we are conscious in any form is a particular instance of the general system.<sup>112</sup> For everything we encounter or are aware of, there must be a niche in the scheme where it fits, a niche which shows what that particular instance is an instance of. The system is thus a system of categories, of modes of being. Speculative philosophy is not one theory among others but the disciplined furthering of the structure and efficiency of its capacity to understand itself. It does not, and could not, tell us what the particular felt quality of things is, or what there might be in reality for us to encounter - that is simply apprehended in immediate experience and science. Nevertheless, the phrases ‘simply apprehended’, ‘immediate experience’ and also ‘science’ are speculative in the sense that they require for their understanding a reference to the general scheme of ultimate notions, which elucidate what immediate experience, apprehension, and so on, are.

From the demand of universality of the scheme it follows that it should be able to interpret itself. Speculative thinking must be self-referentially consistent, and cannot make use of things or practices to which no place can be assigned in the explicit elaboration of categories and procedures. Understanding must be able to understand itself if complete universality is to apply strictly. In other words we must note that understanding or ‘interpretation’ stands in need of an understanding of understanding, an interpretation of interpretation, in order to reach completeness, even in the smallest matters. What could it mean to understand something, anything, without having understood what that is - understanding something? This doesn’t mean that we have to have our metaphysics in place before we can start to do anything else, but it does mean that no understanding can be complete without metaphysics.

Interpretation is the generic name for the relation between the general and the particular. On the side of existence, the act of becoming realizes itself as exhibiting a

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<sup>111</sup> To repeat Strawson (1989, p. 72): ‘If this is metaphysics, thank heavens for metaphysics. To be is to be somehow or other.’

<sup>112</sup> The Oxford Concise Dictionary (ninth edition) defines ‘to interpret’ as *to explain, elucidate or bring out the meaning of words, dreams, creative works etc.* In view of the goal of speculative philosophy,

certain form of definiteness. The act is not the form, it 'exhibits' it (PR 20). The distinction between act and form is not that between two actualities but that between two metaphysical elements or factors. The distinction is simply introduced to satisfy the requirement of doing justice to experience, where we find a difference between things and their characters. We see a red house, and in the seeing is given that the red might occur somewhere else, or that the house might have had a different colour. There is a 'distance' or a 'gap' between the form and actual existence of the house, while at the same time the one cannot be without the other. At this point no further claims as to the relative status of the elements is implied.

Now, seeing something as something else, seeing a particular as exhibiting a general, is what we call understanding. Understanding is interpretation<sup>113</sup>; it too, like the act of becoming, is the realization of a form of definiteness. Formally speaking, the structure is the same in the case of understanding as in the case of realization. Understanding, after all, is an act as well. Thus interpretation is the general structure characterizing both actualisation and its subspecies, understanding.

As far as speculative understanding is concerned, the generalities should be completely universal throughout experience, and they should be coherent. The generalities are universal if they are interpretations of experience as such. The character of coherence has two faces.

For one, the demand of coherence imposed on philosophical thought means that the basic ideas in terms of which the system is developed presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless. This doesn't mean that they should be definable in terms of each other, but rather that they are mutually relevant to the point where isolation of one of them leads to the loss of meaning of all of them. They clarify, correct and enhance each other's meaning; you can't have one without the other. Whitehead says that they should be such as not to be capable of abstraction from one another. Here, again, we see that philosophy is akin to poetry or

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namely establishing general structure, we can say that a speculative interpretation of experience brings out the generalities implicit in experience.

<sup>113</sup> Cp. 1.2, 1.6.

imaginative art: there is no one fixed starting point; we start with a multiplicity of terms which between them entertain the possibility of understanding concrete experience. They define a space of thought. The speculative system is essentially extended (in fact, this statement is almost a pleonasm). The relation between form and act is an example of a coherent relation. The two terms cannot be reduced to each other and neither can they be isolated from each other. They presuppose each other and what is indefinable in one such notion cannot be abstracted from its relevance to the other, for they mutually refer to each other. We might say that coherence is the form of 'organism' in its widest generality. We cannot prove or explain without remainder what is meant here because of the very indefinability which, of course, taints the term 'coherence' itself as well. It is as much part of the circle of understanding as all the other notions employed in speculative thought. All we can do is point out, in each case where someone claims to have a meaningful fundamental notion without this aspect of coherence, the lack of meaning of the notion due to its isolation from others. Whitehead, to be sure, felt no need to defend coherence. For him it is one with rationalism, a virtual definition of intelligibility and the final test of the adequacy of a speculative scheme.

An example of incoherence in general ideas is Descartes' dualism of mind and body. The two ideas are basic in his system, but neither one carries with it a reference to the other - they do not need each other in order to be meaningful. This disconnection of first principles prevents Descartes from giving a reason for the fact that two principles in fact apply - why should there not be a one-substance world, only corporeal or only mental? But, Descartes might reply, any philosophy whatever reaches a point where giving reasons stops. We may try to advance that point as far as possible, but we can never shake it off. There is a given, a point where we have to say 'this is just the way things are'. Moreover, in the case of Descartes, the facts of experience are not disconnected or incoherent in the way the basic ideas are. Descartes' well-known evasion of this matter by a reference to daily life and ordinary experience as the only places where the unity of mind and body can be grasped<sup>114</sup> is

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<sup>114</sup> Letter to Elizabeth, 28 June 1643 (AT VII, 690-695).

a retreat from philosophical understanding, and offers no reply along the lines of the first one, save that we are left wondering what this 'grasp' could be.

But, and this is the second aspect of coherence, the bare fact of it being the case that metaphysical understanding proceeds coherently, or else not, points to the ontological corollary that no entity can be conceived in complete abstraction from the universe. The activity of speculative thinking itself 'exhibits this truth' (PR 3). The speculative scheme as entertained in understanding (apart from the concrete act of understanding it is mere possibility) is itself an instance of this general fact. It is itself as real as the rest, and itself expresses reality's traits - in a twofold manner: it spells them out and is itself an illustration of them.

Apart from coherence, there is also the demand that the system should be logical. Whitehead doesn't say much about this, save that he endorses the principle that a logical inconsistency can only indicate an antecedent error. He does, however, say that logical notions must themselves find their place in the system (PR 3).<sup>115</sup>

Speculative philosophy, as characterized in the manner presented above, starts from daily experience and moves beyond it. But it constitutes no break or rupture with our common experience. For generality is an intrinsic feature of experience, not only in the sense in which we find certain general structural features in different areas of experience, but also in the sense that the whole field of experience is capable of interpretation. We can think about experience - as such. The only warrant for this is the *de facto* presence of such general understanding in the form of a fleeting, vague intuition, which reveals itself as the germ of speculative philosophy, itself in turn the flowering of it. The speculative scheme explicates what is implied in common experience but there is no break between the common and the speculative. For all the caveats and dismissals of final truth we find in Whitehead's philosophy, the conclusion must be that, in Whitehead, speculative thinking conceived of as the framing of necessary and absolutely general ideas that have to do with everything that might happen or be, installs itself as the proper heir to the throne of everyday

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<sup>115</sup> Also, MT 54-55 contains a qualification of the status of logical inconsistency: 'In the nature of things there are no ultimate exclusions, expressive in logical terms. . . . [I]nconsistency is relative to the abstraction involved.' It follows that inconsistency in speculative philosophy is often a matter closely connected with the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

understanding - common sense - and reigns supreme by *natural* verdict.<sup>116</sup> Speculative philosophy is a product of natural history.

## 2.2 Systematicity and Novelty

The scheme is systematic. What does it mean to say that speculative thinking is systematic? What is most essential seems to be the coherence of the basic ideas, the basic generalities. It would seem that it is this more than anything else that renders a philosophy systematic in the sense of consisting of a multiplicity of elements (its extension or separateness) that nevertheless need each other to be what they are (its systematicity). A system is an organism, like the actual entity. Just as the actual entity is a realization of the togetherness of its antecedents, so speculative understanding is the realization of the systematicity of its antecedents, the previous interpretations.<sup>117</sup> That is the way in which progress is realized. Progress is a relative term. There can be no movement towards the apprehension of ultimate general notions outside the general movement from interpretation to interpretation. The systematicity of thought is inherently connected with its processual nature. But in this sense, all thought, as well as everything that is real, is systematic, or organic. So 'system' means 'passage', means 'moving from one to another'. In philosophy, and most definitely in Whitehead's philosophy, the idea of being systematic manifests itself as a demand, an aim: that we surmount 'the delusive clarities of detached expressions' (AI 223). Just as was the case with generality of apprehension, so the systematicity of reality is mirrored in human understanding only to a minor degree - initially, there are only bits and pieces of insight. The movement towards civilization

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<sup>116</sup> Contrast Hume, who has 'Nature' declare in the *Enquiries*: 'Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you, and by the cold reception which your pretended discoveries shall meet with, when communicated' (Hume 1777, 1st Enquiry, section I, 4).

<sup>117</sup> The term 'organism' refers to a structured part-whole relationship where the parts cannot be disjoined from the whole without losing their identity (PR 128f., 309). Note that systematic integration is always integration of *antecedently* realized others (cp. Introduction, 4 and 3.5.2); thus the notion of temporality in its basic sense of a 'passage' or a 'passing on' (CN 54, PR 213) is intrinsic to the notion of an organism.

is a movement towards increased explicit understanding of the generalities relevant to everything that happens, and systematicity is one of them.

So, being systematic is not an attitude of trying to squeeze everything into the smallest possible set of deductively connected theses. Rather, as will be explained, it answers the very nature of existence as a creative advance into novelty, and only as such can it be of guidance in philosophy. For one thing, this means that systematicity introduces movement, difference and novelty, all of which are inconceivable in mere simplicity, be it the simplicity of absolute disconnected spontaneity or that of the absence of any eventuality at all:

Life refuses to be embalmed alive. The more prolonged the halt in some unrelieved system of order, the greater the crash of the dead society. . . . Order is not sufficient. What is required, is something much more complex. It is order entering upon novelty; so that the massiveness of order does not degenerate into mere repetition; and so that the novelty is always reflected upon a background of system. (PR 339)

There may be growth in philosophical understanding. But because of the opposed natures of philosophy and language - the one concerned with generalities, the other with ordering particular realms of our limited experience - every philosophical statement requires, says Whitehead, a leap of the imagination; there is a reference to form beyond the direct meaning of words. A genuinely new philosophy requires new expressions, and new meanings for old words. The idea that an adequate linguistic expression of metaphysical notions is available for thought (for example in the form of clear, distinct and certain premises), is a presupposition Whitehead calls the 'fallacy of the perfect dictionary'. It sets the scholar apart from the philosopher. In a short text, *The Aim of Philosophy* (MT 171-174), Whitehead uses the idea of the 'perfect dictionary' to distinguish between two ways of doing philosophy; it is here, to my mind, that we see most clearly that there is a very real sense in which it is impossible to give an a priori justification of speculative philosophy. There comes a point where the matter simply boils down to a choice - the choice whether to think this way, to actually do it, or not:

The fallacy of the perfect dictionary divides philosophers into two schools, namely, the 'Critical School', which repudiates speculative philosophy, and the 'Speculative School' which includes it. The critical school confines itself to verbal analysis within the limits of the dictionary. The speculative school appeals to direct insight, and endeavours to indicate its meanings by further appeal to situations which promote such specific insights. It then enlarges the dictionary. The divergence between the schools is the quarrel between safety and adventure. (173)

So, speculative philosophy is a creative enterprise, an *adventure*, creating novel ideas expressive of general fact. Its purpose, then, cannot be just to state the metaphysical generalities for lifeless contemplation. But the general principles do not alter, they obtain always and everywhere and are forever the same even though novel reality is continuously coming into being. Why, then are there constantly new ideas, new systems? How can there be an adventurous journey to what is always the case, everywhere? For one, because of the finitude of all human attempts at understanding. In this sense, there is room for progress in philosophy.

What is more important, and is actually an explanation of what is meant by 'finitude', is the fact that, given the all-pervasiveness of the emergence of novelty<sup>118</sup>, there is always renewed occasion for philosophical interpretation; moreover, the 'civilizing' force of speculative philosophy stimulates the envisagement of 'the infinite variety of specific instances which rest unrealized in the womb of nature' (PR 17). Also, actuality is an intensive magnitude. It can be more or less intensive, and the 'zero of intensiveness means the collapse of actuality' (RM 103). But intensity is a matter of articulation and contrast. The better the articulations of the different factors

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<sup>118</sup> In the Introduction, 7, we have seen that the analysis of actuality in terms of occasions implies a central role for the concept of novelty. In fact, the 'category of the ultimate' states that the principle whereby there is the passage from occasion to occasion (creativity) is 'the principle of novelty':

An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies. Thus 'creativity' introduces novelty into the content of the many, which are the universe disjunctively. The 'creative advance' is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which it originates. (PR 21)

As far as ontology *sec* is concerned, novelty is simply nextness. But the novel occasion may realize a novelty of character, as compared to its antecedents. This freedom for novelty of character is given as a possibility in the very concept of an occasion; otherwise it would be impossible to account for its manifest presence in complex occasions such as, for example, human experience. Thus freedom is never banished completely, 'there is always a contingency left open' (PR 284). This metaphysical basis for the role of novelty in human life, however, undergoes considerable qualifications before it becomes fruitful as a notion in ethics. See Bradley 1998.

of actuality, the more intense actuality is. This is what makes metaphysics a natural drive and thought an adventure of ideas. It is part of the nature of adventure that new, unknown things happen. A thing is an adventure only once, namely as long as the outcome is uncertain, open.

A final word on the phrase 'the general nature of things' is in order before we move on to the next section. The phrase can mean two things: (1) Things that are in fact always the case, in all things, but might have been otherwise. These contingent generalities make up, in Whitehead's terminology, the 'present cosmic epoch'. An example would be the extended present of presentational immediacy.<sup>119</sup> (2) The characterizations that pertain to anything simply on account of its being an entity, on account of the fact that it exists. The general interpretation of experience belongs under this heading - as does the fact of contingency itself. Metaphysics proper is only concerned with this aspect of generality.

### *2.3 Speculative Method and the Ontological Principle*

One of the most decisive and insightful analyses of metaphysical thinking is Heidegger's thought on the ontological difference, or the difference between *being* and *beings*. The difference consists in considering the being of beings, that is the whole of everything there is (the *ontic* domain as characterized in its categories and causal relations) and considering being qua being (the light in which the ontic appears; the *ontological*). It constitutes a thorough critique of the very notion of philosophy as a search for a general scheme of principles. For, in framing a set of the ultimate generalities applicable to anything there is (inquiring into the being of beings), we forget that the 'is' in 'anything there is' is not simply to be identified with the principles that determine the nature of things. For, quite apart from their nature,

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<sup>119</sup> Contingent generalities may change! RM 160: '[The universe] is thus passing with a slowness, inconceivable in our measures of time, to new creative conditions, amid which the physical world, as we at present know it, will be represented by a ripple barely to be distinguished from non-entity. The present type of order in the world has arisen from an unimaginable past, and it will find its grave in an unimaginable future.'



things *are*.<sup>120</sup> But the scheme of generalities, insofar as it claims an ultimate status (which it must, at least provisionally), thus denies that there is anything more to say about being as such than what it acknowledges as ultimate generalities. This leads, as we can see in Hegel, to the idea that being itself is the emptiest of all notions.

The (very Whiteheadian) recourse to the word 'concrete' (as in 'what exists concretely'), Heidegger says, is of no avail. For in framing a general scheme, we are representing (*vorstellen*) being, in terms of the generalities we find in beings. We are framing a picture or mirror-image (*speculum*!) of the sphere of beings. But a representation is never adequate to being since being is not an objectifiable thing - is not a '*Gegenstand*'. Now the thought of being as the most abstract or general is the complement of the thought of being as what is most concrete. Both thoughts are tied to representation, for the concept of 'the concrete' has its place in the mirror-image, just like the rest of the concepts. It does not dismantle the '*vorstellende*' mode of thought. (Connecting the abstract and the concrete is then, naturally, of no avail either.)<sup>121</sup>

We will try to show how for Whitehead these criticisms miss the point. His notion of schematic analysis is not a mode of representation but a mode of expression (for consider: a mirror-image is an expression of the original *before* it is a representation of it, and the notion of expression itself is not tied to representation). Our treatment

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<sup>120</sup> This is not to say that traditional metaphysics does not see the ontological difference. We find it, for example, in the distinction between essence and existence, or (in Aristotle) in the distinction between the first and second *ousia*. The point is rather that in traditional metaphysics the essential is seen as that by which what exists exists, in other words: metaphysics proceeds to give an explanation of existence in terms of essences. It will, for example, peg the realm of the ontic on a type of entity whose nature it is to be - God. This Heidegger calls the onto-theological form of metaphysics. Or, as in Aquinas, it will analyse the act of being on analogy with the form (= essence) - matter (= existence) distinction (see 3.4). In the case of Whitehead, the occasion would be the candidate for the entity whose nature it is to be, and indeed we think that a lot of the interpretations of Whitehead are in this sense 'traditionally metaphysical'. We claim, as will be explained in the rest of chapter 2 and chapter 3, that Whitehead, in and by abandoning the notion of substance, abandons the ontological difference, and that in this lies his real significance as a twentieth-century philosopher.

<sup>121</sup> Heidegger:

Wenn das Seyn nie als das 'Generellste' und 'Leerste' und 'Abstrakteste' bestimmt werden kann, weil es allem Vor-stellen unzugänglich bleibt, dann lässt es sich auch nicht, und zwar aus demselben Grunde, als das 'Konkreteste' ausgeben und noch weniger als die Verkoppelung dieser beiden, in sich unzureichenden Auslegungen fassen. (1989, p. 256)

does not aim at a full analysis of the relation between the ontological difference and Whitehead's philosophy. Rather, it uses the ontological difference as a fruitful suggestion to be used in clearing up the nature of Whitehead's metaphysics. A more elaborate confrontation of the philosophies of Heidegger and Whitehead must be postponed to a later date.<sup>122</sup>

Metaphysics uses causal, or quasi-causal, ontic language to make ontological points. For it tries to capture the ontological by a representation of the ontic in general terms. This means that metaphysical language is inherently ambiguous. Leibniz's *Monadology* may be referred to here by way of example. The theme of that work is unity, and one of its basic claims is that there is no way unity can be brought about by collecting or adding up different elements or things so as to produce a unity. Rather, we read in the first paragraph of the *Monadology*, the existence of unity is a condition for the existence of composition.<sup>123</sup> But this ontological point is couched in a story about things there are, so-called monads, the simple substances who function as the carriers, so to speak, of unity. The nature of being, which is such that unity is basic, is being confounded with a type of entity (for Leibniz the monad) which is singled out precisely by the character of unity which is supposed to be its essence. The monad is defined by the general quality of unity, which pertains to each and every one of them. It makes them what they are. Then a whole 'story', if we may put it like that, follows, about these monads. They are created by a single blow, they are one, they are alive, endowed with 'mind', they engage in an activity of mirroring, they happen in causal independence of one another, and so on.

The question to Whitehead now becomes obvious: to what extent is Whitehead a metaphysician in the Heideggerian sense - that is, to what extent is he using ontic language to make ontological points? A second question that arises is: is there any other way to make ontological points than by using ontic language? It seems that Whitehead's insistence that we generalize in metaphysics from particular features of reality to a level of generality that allows us to catch a glimpse of the metaphysical first principles that are always present, always relevant but that can't be literally,

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<sup>122</sup> But see Ford 1985 and Bradley 1991; Also Wahl 1932, for an early discussion.

<sup>123</sup> 'Et il faut bien qu'il y ait des substances simples par tout, parce que sans les simples il n'y auroit point des composés.' (*Monadologie*, in: Leibniz 1875-1890, vol. VI, pp. 598-623)

directly stated, embodies a negative answer to this question. All thought requires a leap of the imagination, as Whitehead said.

In order to really make Whitehead's position clear against the challenge posed by the ontological difference we need to say something further on the nature of speculative thinking. After having done that, we will be in a position to shed some light on the question of the ontic-ontological ambiguity, and how it affects Whitehead's philosophy.

### 2.3.1 *Immediate Experience*

So far we have seen that in Whitehead's philosophy concrete, immediate experience is what metaphysics should deal with. There is an urge to express immediate experience<sup>124</sup>, not just in art, literature and religion but also, intellectually, in philosophy. We want to understand what we find in experience. The comprehensiveness and generality of philosophical thought lies in its being interpretative with regard to immediate experience. As we have seen at length in 1.6, there can be no explanation involved in this kind of general interpretation: the immediacy rules out an 'explanation' of experience in terms of what it is not. Therefore metaphysics is an *expressive* activity. It shows, or exhibits concrete experience as a structured, meaningful whole.

But, says Whitehead, traditional philosophy invariably (with the exception of Plato's dialogues<sup>125</sup>) fails in this respect. It engages in abstract, theoretical discussion,

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<sup>124</sup> The term 'immediate experience' refers in Whitehead (a) to lived experience as we find it, 'the world of daily experience' (PR 156), i.e. that which philosophy tries to elucidate by imaginative generalization. It also refers (b) to the direct experience of antecedents by an occasion - the real inherence of occasions in each other (PR 50). This second, more technical meaning is an interpretation of the solidarity we find in immediate experience, sense (a), while (a) contains many elements besides solidarity which all receive a metaphysical interpretation - think of the forms of definiteness, value, emotion, knowledge, purpose, choice, spatio-temporal extension, colour, bodily movement, sense-perception, mathematical pattern, religious feeling, sociological structure, nature, etc.

At this point in our discussion the emphasis is rather on meaning (a) although it goes without saying that meaning (b) cannot be abstracted entirely from meaning (a), and vice versa.

<sup>125</sup> 'The abiding interest of Plato's Dialogues does not lie in their enunciation of abstract doctrines. They are suffused with the implicit suggestion of the concrete unity of experience, whereby every abstract topic obtains its interest.' ESP 86.

using the format of explanatory discourse where there is nothing to explain, and in effect losing the world the very moment it opens its mouth. The explaining that has been going on in metaphysics has been an explaining away of the 'buzzing world of fellow creatures' (PR 49f.).

This led Whitehead to his program for philosophy. He wanted to create modes of philosophical thinking that would enable us to gain some coordinated understanding of immediate experience without getting stuck in a lifeless world of isolated abstract entities and principles that can never succeed in expressing what is most relevant, the 'concrete unity of experience'.<sup>126</sup> In order to do this he introduced into his scheme the more or less drastic departure from previous philosophical thinking that is given in the notion of an act of becoming. At one with the act of becoming (and its analysis in terms of prehensions and its grouping in sets, or so-called nexus) is the ontological principle. The ontological principle states that apart from occasions there is nothing. Actual entities are the sole realities. This appears to be the direct denial of the ontological difference. '[I]n separation from actual entities there is nothing, merely nonentity - "The rest is silence"' (PR 43).

The four items *act of becoming*, *prehension*, *nexus*, *ontological principle*, contain for Whitehead the attempt to base thought on the most concrete elements in immediate experience (PR 18). In the remainder of 2.3 we will focus on the meaning of the ontological principle. The actual entity which (together with prehension and nexus) makes up the event ontology, will be given more attention in chapter 3. The ontological principle stands apart from the other three in that it is not an element in

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<sup>126</sup> This defect was felt widely in philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century. Both the movement of pragmatism in America and Wittgenstein's philosophy can be seen as reacting against traditional philosophy out of similar concerns, and even logical positivism springs from the closely related feeling that metaphysical propositions are not at all related to experience (in any straightforward sense, at least). It is worth while to remember at this point that, at least as far Anglo-American philosophy is concerned, the initiator of these developments is David Hume in his reaction to the rise of modern science. On more than one occasion Whitehead places himself squarely within Hume's philosophical project, and it is my conviction that the best historical approach to Whitehead would be through Hume. In a sense, Whitehead can be construed as developing the idea that Hume's scepticism is the result of drawing the right philosophical conclusion from the scientific scheme of the early modern period but not succeeding in freeing philosophy from its sway. I will deal with this in more detail later on. See 3.5.

experience, but expresses the structure of experience, that is to say, the way its elements are related.

In order to understand what is meant here, especially by the word 'expresses' as used in the foregoing paragraph, it will be useful to return briefly to the question of the status of speculative ideas, such as the four items just mentioned. We will first consider the meaning of *speculation* as it is found in one of Whitehead's pre-metaphysical texts, namely *The Concept of Nature*; next we will examine what *expression* in speculative thinking amounts to. After that we will be sufficiently prepared to see the relation between the ontological principle and the ontic-ontological distinction.

### 2.3.2 *Speculation in 'The Concept of Nature'*

In an earlier text than *Process and Reality*, namely the opening chapter of *The Concept of Nature* (1920), Whitehead introduces a very general notion of speculation. A short consideration of the development of the notion there will help us to clarify further the status of the metaphysical scheme. There appear to be no significant incompatibilities between the definition of the notion in *The Concept of Nature* and the later metaphysical writings.

'Speculative thinking' has as its aim not so much giving proofs or reasons for certain states of affairs, but the disclosure of what in fact is given, or self-evident. Immediate experience<sup>127</sup> is characterized by this aspect of givenness, or self-evidence. Philosophy, the search after first principles, tries to exhibit the structure of what is in this way 'given' with experience.<sup>128</sup> Metaphysics, understood as inquiring after what is relevant to anything that happens (RM 108), is necessarily speculative in nature. It takes for its subject matter experience as such.

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<sup>127</sup> In both senses identified above. The given in immediate experience (a) is the interpreted world as we find it; the given in immediate experience (b) are the antecedently realized occasions which enter into the constitution of the novel occasion.

<sup>128</sup> This task occupies a central position: 'It is impossible to scrutinize too carefully the character to be assigned to the datum in the act of experience. The whole philosophical system depends on it' (PR 157).

The main objective of the first chapter of *The Concept of Nature*, entitled 'Nature and Thought', is to excavate the topic of the book, the subject matter of the natural sciences, out of the whole of reality. 'Nature' is what discloses itself in the direct deliverance of sense-awareness, in abstraction from the perceiver and in abstraction from any apprehension of moral or aesthetic value. Nature in this sense forms the object of the natural sciences, and in the rest of the book Whitehead sets himself two tasks. One is to develop the general notions in terms of which nature as thus defined can be treated, the other to show how the realm of nature is related to (is a factor of) the rest of reality.

Nature is disclosed, Whitehead writes (CN 5), as a *complex of entities*. What do we mean by 'entity'? If we do not give the word a special theoretical meaning, 'entity' is the equivalent of 'thing', the most general word in English for anything that can be the topic of thought, experience or deliberation. 'Things' are requisite for thought: 'All thought has to be about things.'

The necessity of things for thought is further explained by an examination of the structure of the proposition. Whitehead says that a proposition is composed of phrases<sup>129</sup>, and that some of these are demonstrative, while others are descriptive. A demonstrative phrase is 'a phrase which makes the recipient aware of an entity in a way which is independent of the particular demonstrative phrase' (CN 6). Here 'demonstration' is used in an indicative sense. Whitehead calls it 'speculative' ('a demonstrative phrase demonstrates an entity speculatively', *ib.*). The demonstrative phrase serves as a 'gesture' which transports the attention of the recipient to an

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<sup>129</sup> On page 6 of CN Whitehead uses the example of a 'proposition . . . being communicated by an expositor to a recipient'. He there says that such a proposition may be composed of demonstrative and descriptive phrases. But on page 7 he says: 'A demonstrative phrase is a gesture. It is not itself a constituent of the proposition, but the entity which it demonstrates is such a constituent.' This latter statement seems to be in chime with the use of 'proposition' in Cambridge at the beginning of the century, as constituting the content of the demonstrative and descriptive 'gestures'. (This is pointed out by Künne (1990, p. 118).) The remarks in CN are in correspondence with PR 193: 'the same proposition can constitute the content of diverse judgements.' And also with PR 13, 'no language can be anything but elliptical, . . . no verbal statement is the adequate expression of a proposition'. CN 6 may well be a common case of ellipsis itself, albeit not of the unavoidable sort.

entity, a thing. It is called speculative by Whitehead in reference to the use of 'speculation' in Shakespeare:

There is no speculation in those eyes.<sup>130</sup>

This kind of speculative demonstration can for example (CN 7) be seen in the situation where a lecturer demonstrates, with a frog and a microscope, the circulation of the blood. The resultant awareness in the students of what is demonstrated, namely the circulation of the blood, is independent of the particular demonstrative act (or phrase, as the case may be), here the demonstration involving the frog and the microscope. The sign points away from and beyond itself, as it were, and vanishes when it is successful. It is speculative in the sense of *mirroring* ('speculum') or *expressing* something ('no speculation in those eyes'). Eyes that do not mirror are not expressive, not alive, ghostlike. A ghost has no soul, its eyes are no longer the mirrors of the soul. In both these cases (of mirroring and expressing) there is a directedness away from the image to the thing expressed or reflected. It is possible to focus attention on the mirror image or on my visual experience as such, but usually we use the image and the experience as a mode of disclosure of the thing seen or mirrored, and we are, so to speak, with the thing itself rather than with its image. But the relation of speculation, of expression, is a completely general one, neutral with respect to the ontological categories of expression and expressed. Anything can stand to anything in this relation, as long as there is some commonality, in one form or another. The meaning of 'thing' and 'image' has been changed, and now denotes the invertible speculative relation between two 'things'. The essence of the speculative relation is that the resulting awareness is independent of the particular phrase or perspective. We use them and then discard them, in a way reminiscent of Wittgenstein's ladder save for the contention implicit here that all

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<sup>130</sup> Apparently Whitehead is here quoting by heart, because the line is not, as he says, in *Hamlet* but in *Macbeth*. Macbeth says to the ghost of Banquo (act III, scene iv): 'Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold; / Thou hast no speculation in those eyes, / Which thou dost glare with.' The connection

symbolic activity that is not descriptive is speculative (in this sense), and description follows upon speculation, not the other way around. For, strictly speaking, the description *demonstrates* too.<sup>131</sup>

What has been said applies to speculative philosophy as well. It points at things it does not directly describe, and the pointing is effected by generalizing a specific aspect of experience so as to point to, or exhibit (demonstrate) a general principle. The resulting awareness of the general principle is independent of the particular demonstrative phrase it issued from. In fact, if such a leap away from the initial propositions or forms of disclosure doesn't come about, the philosophical level is never attained. For philosophical thought proceeds by way of imaginative generalization of a specific observed state of affairs. This is the only way open to metaphysics because the first principles (the 'generalities', in the sense of what is relevant to anything that happens) can never fail of exemplification. As we have seen this means that they cannot be discovered by the 'method of difference', whereby something is noticed because it is not always present.<sup>132</sup> In this respect there is a difference between demonstrating the circulation of the blood and demonstrating ultimate generalities. The final direct acquaintance does not come about; what is ultimately general must remain implicit and in the background of all express statements. Some statements serve better to focus the mind on this background than others; together these comprise speculative philosophy.

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between *life* and *speculation* is, of course, crucial and can be expanded indefinitely (this is the unifying topic of MT).

<sup>131</sup> The speculative relation could be called a completely generalized concept of symbolism. In *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* Whitehead gives the following example of the invertibility and categorial neutrality of the relation: 'If you are a poet and wish to write a lyric on trees, you will walk into the forest in order that the trees may suggest the appropriate words. Thus for the poet . . . the trees are the symbols and the words are the meaning. He concentrates on the trees in order to get at the words. . . . For us, the words are the symbols which enable us to capture the rapture of the poet in the forest. The poet is a person for whom visual sights and sounds and emotional experiences refer symbolically to words. The poet's readers are people for whom his words refer symbolically to the visual sights and sounds and emotions he want to evoke. Thus in the use of language there is a double symbolic reference: - from things to words . . . and from words back to things' (S 12).

<sup>132</sup> PR 4: 'Sometimes we see an elephant, and sometimes we do not. The result is that an elephant, when present, is noticed.'



The point is that this is a way to get a hold of generalities, not by trying to state them from scratch, but rather by seeing what kind of relevant factors in certain fields of experience can be generalized to cover other fields. When such a generalization succeeds, we may in retrospect conclude that there has been a general principle at work in the field of the original observation as well.

But there are conditions of success in imaginative speculative construction that must be rigidly adhered to, Whitehead says (PR 5). These amount to two things. For one, generalization should start from ‘particular factors discerned in particular topics of human interest’, so that there is at least some application.<sup>133</sup> And besides that the generalization should have some applicability outside the field of origination. If there is no extended application a generalization remains ‘merely an alternative expression of notions applicable to the field of origination’. Thus, in speculative philosophy, we utilize specific notions, applying to a restricted group of facts, for the divination of the generic notions which apply to all facts (*ib.*). The ongoing activity of devising generally applicable imaginative constructs allows us to *discern the general principles as in process of illustration (ib.)*. That is the only way in which speculative metaphysics can work, as the ongoing illustration of what cannot be captured in itself, namely the final, universal metaphysical principles. It is thanks to the ongoingness, the moving from field of origination to field of application, that the general principles emerge into awareness, but they can never be caught; when the process comes to a standstill, generalities recede into the background and the massive particularity of situation and circumstance prevails. There can be no thought without movement. Here we see another feature of the structural identity between the speculative enterprise and what it expresses. It illustrates its own content.

When we connect the account of method in speculative philosophy we have given with the analysis of speculative demonstration in *The Concept of Nature*, the similitudes are apparent. In both places, speculative demonstration is the pointing

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<sup>133</sup> Application here means interpretation. It seems a bit odd to assume that a generalization of a trait present in some area of experience can, when applied to that same area, add something to the initial situation. Application in another field seems to be a prerequisite for generality. A general notion applicable to only one thing is not a general notion. This ‘condition’ seems superfluous in the light of the next one.

out of a thing (meaning, formally, a 'that about which we can think') in a way that is *independent* of the particular demonstrative phrase or image: a 'leap' (PR 13) is required to make any speculative proposition meaningful. It is precisely because of the way in which this general principle, itself discovered by the method of imaginative generalization, goes all the way down from philosophical thinking to everyday language use, that speculative philosophy is not alien to common experience, but flows back into it, elucidating it and shaping it. There is no abysmal divide between philosophical language and ordinary, scientific or poetic language for they all are speculative in nature:

[N]o language can be anything but elliptical, requiring a leap of the imagination to understand its meaning in its relevance to immediate experience. (PR 13)

The speculative method in philosophy is concerned with demonstration. Whitehead also calls it 'exhibition' and 'disclosure'. But, like the speculative demonstration in linguistic structure, 'demonstration' is *first* a matter of gesture, pointing out, exhibition, and only *thereafter*, and on the basis of it, a matter of logical deduction. Demonstration is not primarily of a logical nature. Speculative philosophy cannot ignore logic - a 'complete humility before logic' is one of the stringent demands on philosophical thought (PR 17). But at the same time logic can do no more than provide an auxiliary tool:

[Logical arguments] are merely subsidiary helps for the conscious realization of metaphysical intuitions. - *Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum*. This saying . . . should be the motto of every metaphysician. He is seeking, amid the dim recesses of his ape-like consciousness and beyond the reach of dictionary language, for the premises implicit in all reasoning. The speculative methods of metaphysics are dangerous, easily perverted. So is all Adventure. (AI 295)

The logical and the critical dimensions are, for Whitehead, subsidiary to the speculative dimension of philosophy. Because this is so, and because of the nature of speculation, metaphysics doesn't explain, but rather discloses. Also it is not at odds with the common usage of words. Rather, it exhibits the same tendency, the same structure. For ordinary language, like speculative language and unlike dictionary language, is creative and fluid, and not overconcerned about staying within the parameters of accuracy set out by previous, fossilised modes of expression. Meaning

develops. It is contended that this characteristic of language, which pertains equally to creative thought<sup>134</sup>, shows us something about the nature of reality. It *flows*.

The view of language and thought as not reducible to each other lies at the heart of Whitehead's metaphysics, and is indeed one of the main reasons for his metaphysics. It is one of the main reasons why there can be and should be metaphysics.<sup>135</sup> If one endorses another view of language one is very likely not to see any possibility or desirability for speculative thinking, because imaginative generalisation, in moving beyond fixed meaning, stands or falls with the idea that language and thought do not reflect into each other perfectly, and that there are no realms of final, fixed definiteness. Deny that, and you lose speculation. The rationality of the system would be violated or at least misrepresented if we were to treat the pre-given meaning of words as if they were already completely articulated as to their implications and semantic content, fixed or unchangeable, and also if we were to try to present the system 'in an orderly manner' by reconstructing first the meanings of these words and then to go on, explaining the rest while using the words simply as vehicles for thought - that, in fact, could not be done, because the rest is needed right from the outset, in the elucidation of their meanings. In philosophy we use the words whose meanings we have yet to clarify. The discursiveness of the system - of human thought in general - does not diminish the coherence of its terms, that is, the fact that its terms require each other in order to be meaningful, or in other words, the fact that the terms cannot be abstracted from each other (as is the case with all entities). Philosophy has always already begun, and as we go along, the words correct each other.

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<sup>134</sup> An answer to the much-debated question of the relation between thought and language from a Whiteheadian point of view cannot be attempted here; it requires a separate study. Suffice it to remark that, as should be clear from everything we have been saying so far, Whitehead does not share the view of the majority of contemporary philosophers, who, in the words of one well-known spokesman, 'cannot see that *thought* means anything more than *language* does' (Rorty, in Saatkamp 1995, p. 123). On the other hand, it is most natural to assume that complex thought requires language of some sort (MT 40-41). It would seem that the centrality of *expression* as the main form of language *use* mediates between thought and language, but I will leave it at this mere conjecture.

<sup>135</sup> AI 222.

The following quotation may help to clarify this:

The first chapter in philosophic approach should consist in a free examination of some ultimate notions, as they occur naturally in daily life. I am referring to the generalities which are inherent in literature, in social organization, in the effort towards understanding physical occurrences.

There are no definitions of such notions. They are incapable of analysis in terms of factors more far-reaching than themselves. Each must be displayed as necessary to the various meanings of groups of notions, of equal depth with itself. (MT 1)

The starting point of philosophy is with notions as they occur naturally in daily life. For these are the initial interpretations of immediate experience we perforce employ. In philosophy we focus on those notions that are ultimate, meaning, those whose meanings cannot be defined but only elucidated in relation to other notions of equal ultimacy. These together form the general background against which more special notions acquire their meaning. The 'speculative endeavour' consists in framing a general system of these ultimate notions that shows them in their coherence and their applicability to the multifariousness of experience.

A short example may help to clarify this procedure further. Let's take *justice* as an 'ultimate notion that occurs naturally in daily life'. When we try to find out what justice amounts to, the process of elucidation arrives at other notions, such as person, respect, freedom, responsibility, forgiveness, maybe crime and punishment and getting what you deserve. But this set of notions cannot serve as an explanation in the sense of a reduction of justice to more basic elements that are themselves not defined by the role they play in the meaning of justice. Rather, the elucidation of the meaning of each of them will, eventually, refer to justice as a basic notion. The notions illustrate the phrase 'all in all'.<sup>136</sup> In philosophy, we try to spell out all the relations between such ultimate notions. The result of this is, as Whitehead calls it, a scheme of ultimate ideas, ideally universal or comprehensive (no ultimate notions

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<sup>136</sup> To some extent, this meaning holism applies to other fields of meaning as well, but the situation isn't quite so drastic outside first philosophy, as the example of successful progressive science shows. See ESP 86 and AE 123, 154f.

excluded) with which all experience can be interpreted. Interpretation here means that all experiences are different expressions of the scheme of ideas.

### 2.3.3 *Expression*

The foregoing analysis has brought us to the point where we can identify the notion of expression as, not of sole, but of basic to the speculative scheme. The notions of the scheme, we have seen it a number of times, all presuppose each other. They are part of each other's meaning and yet cannot be reduced to one another. We can say they express each other like, for example, a kiss may express love, or shouting anger. In these examples there is not so much an inner or immaterial state with an outer, arbitrary symbol as an interdependency in which both sides need each other. The rationality of speculative thought, guaranteed by the coherence of its notions, is, like these examples, an *expressive* rationality. We will use the phrase 'expressive coherence' for the nature of rationality as Whitehead conceives it.

We can also say, but this is running ahead of the analysis of chapter 3, that occasions are expressive in nature. For consider: the way occasions are related, which, as we have seen, Whitehead calls prehension, is a real presence of the one in the other. This presence cannot be a representation - that would immediately vitiate Whitehead's intention to get rid of the epistemological problem bequeathed to him by modern philosophy. Neither can it be the presence of a real component of the occasion - in that case 'prehension' would mean literally, physically seizing, which is absurd. Prehension involves temporality in the sense of passing on. It is only when the dimension of 'one after another' is intrinsic to an actual entity (hence the name 'occasion') that we do not need an extra element<sup>137</sup> to perform the connection of the actual entities - it is given with passage. Thus passage is what guarantees the genuine sense of being amid others any interpretation of experience must be able to capture. But we can still ask, what is the nature of the presence of one occasion in another and thereby of occasions among each other? Here the notion of expression comes into play. An occasion, on account of its occasionality, expresses itself in its

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<sup>137</sup> An extra element would mean that the problem would repeat itself.

environment - in the others - and is an expression of the others. Whitehead is careful to make clear that the way in which an occasion is part of another is not that of representation (PR 237), but that of a re-enactment of the antecedent in the successor occasion (PR 237f.). If re-enactment is not representation nor mere resemblance (whereby the successor is *just like* the re-enacted antecedent), the antecedent occasion must in some sense be present in the successor *as* antecedent, *as* past. As Whitehead says, 'It is the cumulation of the universe and not a stage-play about it' (PR 237). The temporal dimension is intrinsic to the occasion; an antecedent occasion is expressed by and expresses itself in a successor, like the past expresses itself in the present.

Thus the notion of expression helps to elucidate the notion of 'presence in another', central both to the speculative scheme and to the relatedness of occasions, in such a way as to avoid an interpretation of 'presence in another' as either representation, being a real component, or as a form of mere resemblance.<sup>138</sup> The 'connexity of existence' is expressive in nature, and it is the 'essence of understanding' (MT 32).

In 2.1 we said that the distinction between method and content disappears on the level of speculative generality. In the light of the notion of expression, this means that the speculative theory is an expression of the nature of existence and it can be so because existence is itself speculative, that is expressive, in nature.

We have defined the relation between occasions as being 'in' each other. What has to be taken seriously is the thought that the antecedent occasion is *itself* part of the constitution of the successor occasion. There is a real inherence of the one in the

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<sup>138</sup> The sense in which I employ the word 'expression' is not quite the same as that of Whitehead in the chapter titled 'Expression' in MT (20-41). He there limits the term to 'the activity of finitude impressing itself on its environment' (MT 20) and he says that this notion presupposes the more general notion of importance, as a diffusion throughout the environment of something which will make a difference. Importance is derived from the immanence of infinitude in the finite, whereas expression represents the immanence of the finite in the multitude of its fellows beyond itself. But since all existence and all agency is that located in occasions, the difference between importance and expression in Whitehead's sense must not be exaggerated. No expression without importance, but also no importance without expression. Moreover, the use made of it in the present study, though distinct from the use Whitehead makes of it in the chapter in MT, does not seem to conflict with it, and Whitehead himself often uses 'expression' in my sense, that is 'being present in another, other than as a representation or a resemblance'.

other. The notion of expression involves basically the same point. One thing, word or concept, expresses something else insofar as that other thing is really inherent in the act of experience, in the manner of the expressing entity but with a reference beyond that manner (otherwise the two would collapse into each other). Just as experience is the experience of an other, which is by reason of the experience really inherent in that act of experience, but as a transcendent other (AI 180), so for an expression what is expressed inheres in the expression as a transcendent other.

#### 2.3.4 *The Ontological Principle*

Now we turn to the ontological principle. Whitehead's ontology works with occasions (events), that are related (these relations are called prehensions), and are also ordered (these orderings or groupings are called nexus or societies). The ontological principle expresses the status of the different elements. It says that apart from things that are actual (occasions) there is nothing, and so the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite, actually existing, occasions or entities. Apart from these, there is nothing, the individual being is the only reality.<sup>139</sup> 'Creativity' is the name Whitehead gives to the ultimate factor in his ontology, the movement from possibility to actuality, or the becoming of events. Events (actual entities) *are* not, they *become*. This becoming is not in physical time (PR 283). The ontology of process occupies the region in-between the ontic and the ontological<sup>140</sup>, because over and above the process of becoming of each individual

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<sup>139</sup> Martin 1961, p. 229.

<sup>140</sup> Maybe this is still speaking too much from within the ontological difference. What really happens in process philosophy is that the distinction is reinterpreted in processual terms. Becoming flows from the ontological to the ontic and back again. They are stages in the act of becoming: In the act of becoming the many become one. This is a process of self-realization of the one novel entity out of the many that make up its actual world. But, by the ontological principle, its actual world is simply the entity itself at the outset of the act of becoming. There is no 'world', no 'appearing' outside of the actual entities, and yet the antecedent entities that make up the world of the becoming entity are not created by the act of becoming that receives them as factors in its own nature (AI 179). Thus insofar as the occasion, as an act of self-realization, realizes the appearance of the world (as the experienced togetherness of antecedents) and is nothing over and above that, we can say that we are on the ontological side. Insofar as the occasion is itself a novel entity added to the many which it finds, and insofar as the categorial determinations and causal relations of all occasions and what is given with them (forms, propositions, facts, etc.) determine its structure, it is ontic.

actual entity, there are no further ontic relations or causal determinations (they are all indeed contained in it; 'process' is in this sense an ontic term) but, at the same time, the process of becoming (creativity) is ontological in that it is the light in which beings appear<sup>141</sup>, the light 'that never was, on sea or land'.<sup>142</sup> For we must not forget that the individual act of becoming, because it is self-realizing (PR 222), is non-aetiological *insofar as* it can have no antecedently actual or realized causes (efficient, material, formal or final) that *produce* it (and so it escapes the ontic). Rather, the act of becoming *takes on* its causes in realizing itself as the togetherness of its actual world. In other words, for an ontology of becoming causality is at bottom a mode of expression 'through another' and requires the notion of expression in its interpretation, rather than the other way around.

When considering the ontological principle the first thing to bear in mind is that a reference to an actual entity is always a reference to an *act of becoming*, a concrescence. So, the reasons for things are to be found in definite acts of becoming. For example, the other deficiently actual elements in the categorial scheme, prehensions and nexus, are what they are because of the actual entities they participate in. A concrete fact of relatedness (a prehension) is what it is because of the complete actual entity it is a concrete element of. A nexus too, in turn, lacks its own act of becoming and is thus actual only as actualized in actual entities that belong together in some form or other. It can only be understood in reference to them, and the togetherness of them is, of course, itself referent to an occasion also. The ontological principle can be stated as 'no actual entity, then no reason' (PR 19). The reasons for things are only to be found in actual entities. But the act of becoming, as an instance of creativity (of 'the many becoming one') cannot - *as* an act of becoming - be referred to other acts. It is the togetherness of others, but it can be that only insofar as it is *new*, original. Therefore, as far as its own bare existence is concerned, it is its own reason, its own ground. All actualization is self-realization.

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<sup>141</sup> See the beginning of 2.3.

<sup>142</sup> Creativity is the 'universal of universals' (PR 21).



The 'how' of its existence, by contrast, is referent to other actual entities, as well as to itself. For an actual entity is a taking, or gathering together in a novel synthesis, of others. As in the account of speculative method, it expresses or mirrors them. The ontological principle is the generalization of Locke's 'power is a great part of our complex ideas of substances'.<sup>143</sup> 'Substance' becomes 'actual entity', and 'power', the presence of one in the other, becomes the prehensive relation, which is in essence as indicated above, the relation of expression. Both rationality and causality are forms of expression, of the ultimate notion of one being present in another, the general description of experience.<sup>144</sup>

In speaking of something being its own ground, or providing its own *ratio essendi*, we are stretching the meaning of the words 'ground' and 'reason', for in assigning grounds or reasons, we are normally connecting something with something else - which serves as ground or reason. In the classical formulation of Wolff: *principium dicitur id quod in se continet rationem alterius rei*. The essence of reason is to go from one thing to another: to connect, illuminate, analyse or synthesize. In saying that actual entities are self-actualizations, therefore, it would seem that we are affirming a difference within an actual entity as such: an actual entity is always, in one sense or another, *for itself*, and is so on account of its being. Besides expressing others, an actually existing thing therefore expresses itself also. In the end, however, these two expressive modes are one and the same act of being; the actual entity expresses itself through others, and others through itself.

Thus, the actual entity is complex and situated. It is a togetherness-in-experience of others, amid others. But what remains true, is that we are talking of beings instead of being, or rather that there is the explicit view that apart from the being of beings there is nothing. Here, Whitehead thinks of himself as Aristotelian, and this is one of the formulations of the ontological principle, 'the general Aristotelian principle . . . that, apart from things that are actual, there is nothing' (PR 40). *What this being of beings consists in is what is spelled out in the metaphysics*. The basic fact that

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<sup>143</sup> Locke 1690, II, XXIII, Section 7. See PR 18-19.

<sup>144</sup> Cp. Introduction, 4.

things are there for each other, the irreducible fact that to exist means to be one amid a plurality of fellow creatures gathered together, is constitutive of the nature of existence. The 'amid' has to be understood as the act of becoming that is the individual being; therefore the light in which beings appear (concrete experience) and being considered as a whole (the process of coming into being) are the flip sides of the same coin - the event or occasion. Just like the speculative scheme, the actual entity illustrates, or expresses, its own content, and that is what constitutes its nature. The occasion *is* its situated actualisation; *that it is*, and *what it is* are not abysmally divided.<sup>145</sup>

This basic fact is speculatively analysed and of a speculative, expressive nature itself. That means, at least so it seems, that it sails safely past the Scylla and Charybdis of the ontic-ontological distinction. For although in a sense there are only beings (actual entities), we are not forced to think of the being of beings in terms of a representation of the realm of the ontic, a '*Vorstellung*'. Because in the final (speculative) analysis, all ontic determinations are taken up into *expression* as the appearing of beings (the present occasion and the antecedents as experienced) which is at the same time the being of beings<sup>146</sup>, and are strictly speaking themselves ways of expression, representation itself has to be understood in terms of expression and not the other way around. In the speculative notion of expression what appeared at first as an ambiguity, namely the unresolvedness as to the ontic or ontological status of the terms used in speculative philosophy, is reduced to a harmless, natural aspect of philosophy. In fact, it carries the muster of reality.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Cp. in this connection the transitive use of *to be* (mediated by *to become*) in the explanation of the Category of the Ultimate: 'the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively' (PR 21).

<sup>146</sup> This is now simply another way of saying that occasions of experience are the final real things of which the world is made up.

<sup>147</sup> If, by way of a final objection, it were said that the very notion of 'expression' derives from the realm of the ontic (think of minting coins or printing books), we would simply repay the compliment: that holds just as well for terms like 'difference' and even 'ontological'. But in our account it is not at all mysterious that words that function in well-defined contexts of experience should be open to speculative generalization. It is something we find in everyday life. Also, a generalization is more a widening of meaning than a metaphorical putting to use of a fixed meaning. Thus 'expression' as used here is not a metaphor derived from the practice of imprinting the form of one thing in another, but a widening of the meaning based on what formally goes on in the practice of imprinting the form of one

## 2.4 Limits of Ultimate Interpretation

The ontological principle asserts that apart from actual entities there is nothing. In other words, the final real things 'of which the universe is made up', in which everything finds its place, are actual entities, that is, occasions of experience. We have considered the ontological principle as an element in a speculative theory - that is, we have discussed the nature and status of speculative principles - and we have considered the content of the ontological principle, the principle of *being*. A problem remains: Not everything is an occasion, so there must be senses of 'to be' which do not refer to occasions. How do they relate to the ontological principle as a principle of being? Our consideration of this question completes the discussion of the nature of speculative thinking.

As we have said, the ontological principle does not assert that there is nothing else to be found in experience than occasions of experience. For consider: these occasions exhibit entities, abstract from those occasions and yet participating in them. These are the forms of definiteness, or 'eternal objects'. Also, the occasions themselves have a structure, explicable by reference to a number of 'categories of existence', which include prehensions, the concrete facts of relatedness between occasions, propositions, nexus (groupings of occasions), multiplicities and contrasts. All of these *are* in some sense. And then, finally, we have creativity, potentiality and actuality. These too, can be said to *be* in some sense, although, for example, creativity is actual only in its instances, and potentiality qua potentiality is of course not actual. (This last statement serves only to make things worse than they are already, for now we have to ask what it means to say that potentiality *is*.) In short, prehensions and nexus are as 'real, individual, and particular' as actual occasions; the others are 'derivative abstractions' (PR 20).

It may seem difficult to see what could be meant by saying that prehensions and nexus are as real, individual and particular as occasions. With 'actual entity' or 'occasion' being the name given to the most concrete elements in experience, what

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thing in another - namely the presence of one thing in another. In a way, we might say generalization for Whitehead means formalization.

could distinguish them from prehensions and nexus when these, too, are as real, individual and particular? Where is the difference?

But I think we can explain what is meant here. The actual occasion is an occasion of experience, an event or act of becoming. Now, if actual occasions are the final real things of which the world is made up, and if the other kinds of entities have their being only as abstractions from actual occasions - they enjoy derivative actuality to put it in a phrase characteristic of Whitehead - two questions emerge: What is this 'being' all these entities share (with the occasions as the 'final' or 'fullest' instances of it, the 'really reals'), and how are we to understand the degrees of actuality it involves? What is, within the Whiteheadian metaphysics, the proper analysis of derived actualities? What does it mean to say that abstractions are real but not (fully) actual?

Philosophy is the 'criticism of abstraction', that is, it can illuminate and hence criticize abstract statements concerning reality against the background of concrete experience. In doing this it is the prime antidote against misplaced concreteness, which is neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely in so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought (PR 7f.) or misplacedly attributing concrete existence to the abstract. For philosophy as an explanatory activity this means, not so much explaining how concrete fact can be built up out of universals - as we have seen before the answer would be 'in no way' (PR 20), but rather 'explaining how concrete fact can exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature' (PR 20). Philosophy is explanatory of abstraction. The kind of explanation (which, in the terminology we use throughout this study, should be called 'explication' instead of 'explanation') that is involved here we have termed speculative, and we have tried to determine its nature in some detail.

A first thing to note when thinking about abstraction is that you cannot take out something that has not been previously put in, or has not been there all along. In

other words, abstract entities are really inherent in concrete actuality, to be isolated for consideration by the mind<sup>148</sup>:

It is the foundation of the metaphysical position which I am maintaining that the understanding of actuality requires a reference to ideality. The two realms are intrinsically inherent in the total metaphysical situation. (SMW 158)

These two short sentences throw a great deal of light on Whitehead's philosophy. The irreducibility of actuality and ideality - of occasion and abstraction - is asserted by the word 'foundation'. For Whitehead, what is foundational is in a sense self-evident. Its evidence couldn't be brought about by any procedure whatsoever. Philosophy can do no more than point out where the foundations lie, and then *elucidate* or *disclose* what is implied by these through the method of speculation I have set forth in the previous sections. The main thing here is to see that philosophical elucidation or disclosure is not a matter of defining the foundational terms (such as actuality and ideality) in terms that are more fundamental or less ambiguous, for these are simply lacking. All we can, and all we have to do, is to express the meanings of the terms through an explicit statement of the relations between them and others of the same level. This is what Whitehead calls 'coherence'. The systematicity of philosophy is this coherence, the fact that the words in the basic vocabulary of philosophy cannot be defined in terms of higher generality than they themselves. Elucidation in philosophy comes down to showing how the fundamental notions essentially incorporate references to each other.

It is easy to see that this description of the systematicity of philosophy also implies the generality of philosophy. Only the 'notions themselves' can show us how far they go and of what variations in meaning they are capable. To employ a somewhat dangerous metaphor, which should not be pushed beyond the limits of usefulness: we do not look from the outside to the house of thought, we live in it, and it is only by wandering about that we can get an idea of its shape and character. It is a mistake

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<sup>148</sup> This last phrase, 'consideration by the mind' naturally has a precise parallel in terms of eternal objects and the prehension of eternal objects in the conceptuality of Whiteheadian metaphysics for which I refer to PR III, IV.

to think of philosophy as starting with clearly stated definitions and premises.<sup>149</sup> On the speculative level, Ockham's razor takes on the form of giving fundamental notions the widest general meaning of which they appear to be capable. The scope of a fundamental notion 'should not be limited otherwise than by the necessity of its meaning' (AI 237).

Accordingly, the appeal to concrete experience as the starting point and focus of philosophical thinking, is not an appeal to a level of clarity and distinctness, like a realm of sense-data might be, from which to start philosophical discussion. Concrete experience is shot through with generalities, with eternal objects, or, in the sentence quoted above, ideality. Concrete experience does not lack full articulation, and in that sense philosophy doesn't occupy a place over and against experience, rather, it is itself a factor in it, one of its articulations. It doesn't start from nothing but takes the articulated world it finds and uses it for its own projects. And, precisely because it is not a detached overview but stands firmly within experience, philosophical thought can become a factor shaping or even changing experience. (This is the most general description of what Whitehead calls the process of 'civilization'.)

A metaphysical analysis has to be self-referentially consistent. This means, first, that it cannot deny the reality of the presuppositions that make it possible, and second, that it has to be able to provide an analysis of itself. A fully adequate and general speculative philosophy, in Whitehead's sense, must be able to show how philosophy or philosophical activity itself exhibits the characteristics of reality. The two sentences from *Science and the Modern World* quoted above are a case in point. The bare fact of the existence of this slight piece of text is an illustration of its meaning, in other words it expresses what it is. Also, in terms of the metaphor I employed, it speaks 'from within', itself using and in that usage expressing part of the meaning of its terms, rather than from without, establishing referential correspondence with what is in fact the case. Speculative truth is expressively conformal rather than correspondentially conformal.

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<sup>149</sup> Cp. in this connection AI 231: 'It throws an interesting light on the belief in a well-understood technical phraseology reigning in philosophy, that an accomplished philosopher censured in print, my use of the word Feeling as being in a sense never before employed in philosophy.'

In terms of the problem we started with, the upshot of this is not to try and see lived experience as being 'in reality' what the metaphysical interpretation is taken to be saying it is ('I am really nothing but a nexus of occasions'), but instead to try and take metaphysical analysis as offering an incentive to take experience in its full concreteness as seriously as possible.<sup>150</sup> A general structure, such as the metaphysical analysis yields it, is not an *underlying level* of really reals. Speculative philosophy - in its proceeding articulation - brings the mind back to concrete experience through analysing just how our general thought hooks up with it, or better, how it is enveloped in it (Whitehead sometimes uses the word 'implied' in this connection stressing its literal meaning of 'enfolded within'). Philosophy, it has been said, is the criticism of abstractions.

Still, Whitehead says that actual entities are drops of experience and that these are the final real things of which the world is made up (PR 18). Yet several hundred of pages later, but still in the same book, he says that it is 'childish to enter upon thought with the simple-minded question, What is the world made of? The task of reason is to fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things' (PR 342).

My proposal is to start with the latter statement, and interpret the former in terms of it. The meaning of the former can then be explained like this: the bare, but articulate, experience, as it presents itself, is what reality is. Because fully articulate, everything (including me-experiencing-now) has to be located within this experiential, eventual environment. Existence means first and foremost 'experience', 'immediacy'. (This is reminiscent of the ancient conception of truth as the divine light which is so luminous that we can't see it: we always seem to have already jumped over it when we start to talk about what there is.) The statement of PR 18 can now be interpreted as meant to curb the tendency of postulating hidden causes and productive principles that, somehow, bring about the world as we experience it. It is itself the prime example of philosophy as a therapy against misplaced concreteness,

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<sup>150</sup> See the appendix for an example.

and the explication of the meaning implied in it is not a prolegomenon to philosophy, it is philosophy itself.

The other categories of existence are factors within experience and their mode of being is that of ideality, meaning they do not possess agency but are merely elements in the form (the *eidōs*) the agencies take on. As Whitehead says in the text quoted above: ideality and actuality are both intrinsically inherent in the *total metaphysical situation*.

But what about the 'total metaphysical situation': is it something over and above the togetherness of occasions and forms in the constitution of occasions (the only *loci* Whitehead admits - 'there is no mere togetherness of abstractions' (PR 18))? If not, then actuality would be equivalent to the total metaphysical situation, and the inherence in it of a realm of ideality would be incomprehensible, for ideality is not actuality (only the occasions are that). If there is a difference, and the 'total metaphysical situation' is a third, next to actuality and ideality, the inherence is still incomprehensible. For consider: it is only good speculative methodology to say that the notions of actuality and ideality require each other; they are a fine example of a coherent set of notions. This is what Whitehead expressed in the quotation cited above ('the understanding of actuality requires a reference to ideality'). In fact, these notions are the foundation upon which the speculative scheme is erected, they form the starting point. We do not have to say that Whitehead constructs them in such a way that the distinction between them runs parallel with the ontological difference - in which case he could be said to reduce being to ideality, and have a straightforward ontic notion of the actual entity. On the contrary, we have indicated (and will return to this in the next chapter) that the ontological difference, from the point of view of Whitehead's philosophy, can be seen as the result of substance metaphysics. In a metaphysics of occasions the difference disappears, or rather, is re-allocated along the lines of the occasion's self-realization.

But the 'total metaphysical situation' is not simply the coherence of ideality and actuality, the inherence of one in the other. It has to be more than that, for it is that of which both ideality and actuality are intrinsically part, that which allows us to see that ideality and actuality, although they require each other, still stand apart, and that 'concrete existence is always more than its forms, and inexplicable by forms' (PR



20). It remains singularly impervious to speculative analysis, and yet it is that which allows for a plurality of speculative notions, which require each other without collapsing into each other. Whitehead calls it the 'union of opposites', reigning 'throughout the universe':

The universe is dual because each actuality requires abstract character. The universe is dual because each occasion unites its formal immediacy with objective otherness. The universe is *many* because it is wholly and completely to be analysed into many final actualities - or in Cartesian language, into many *res verae*. The Universe is *one*, because of the universal immanence. There is thus a dualism in this contrast between the unity and multiplicity. Throughout the universe there reigns the union of opposites which is the ground of dualism. (AI 190)

But this 'union of opposites' lacks all philosophic articulation. The basic principle of process, which encompasses the movement from one opposite to the other, is supposed to be the expression of the unity of opposites<sup>151</sup>, but it can never do that on account of the very methodology of speculative metaphysics. It seems that all it can do, and maybe this is not such a mean achievement, is hand the tools needed to discover the problem. It can conceptualize and express its own fundamental incoherence, i.e. the fact that the *union* of opposites can only be thought as a union of *opposites*. The absolute - the *union* of opposites - is the ground of intelligibility but it is itself not intelligible.<sup>152</sup> On the assumption of the adequacy of Whitehead's philosophy, this means that Whitehead shows where our ignorance lies, and to what it summons us. True ignorance is systematic ignorance, discovered after we have abandoned contentment with the elusive clarity of detached expressions. In the notion of 'process' we find this ignorance at the basis of philosophical thinking. It is nothing else than the fact that a concrete existent as such is always more than its forms, and that this 'more' is therefore 'inexplicable by forms' (PR 20).<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> '[P]rocess is the way by which the universe escapes from the exclusions of inconsistency. . . . Process is the immanence of the infinite in the finite' (MT 54).

<sup>152</sup> Cp. in this connection PR xii-xiii: 'though throughout the main body of the work I am in sharp disagreement with Bradley, the final outcome is after all not so greatly different.'

<sup>153</sup> Here we might say that this is precisely the point of the ontological difference. The answer to that objection has to be - yes and no. Yes, insofar as there is definitely a fundamental difference of an ontological nature here between the coherent notions on the one hand, and that which they express or circumscribe, to put it like that, on the other. No, insofar as that difference is not that of the ontic -

### 3 Occasions

#### 3.1 Order of Chapter 3

‘An einem heiteren Sommertage im Freien erschien mir einmal die Welt samt meinem Ich als eine zusammenhängende Masse von Empfindungen’, Ernst Mach writes.<sup>154</sup> Whitehead’s metaphysics of occasions, which is a metaphysics of experience, can be seen as an elaboration of this idea, which centers around the claim that the ‘mass of experiences’ is *all* there is. Furthermore, *experience* taken in such an ultimate way, is its own realization: it has no prior subject of which it is a state. Thus an experience is an event, a process, and the mass of experiences constituting reality is itself processual also. Experiences experience other experiences in a continual creative advance.

Whitehead’s metaphysics moves within the distinction between the abstract and the concrete. One basic insight we have already come across is that full individual concreteness is inexplicable by forms: there can be no finally adequate abstract account of concreteness. Whitehead says the purpose of philosophy is misunderstood when we think philosophy tries to explain or reach concreteness by adding up universals. It is the other way around: in philosophy we try to show how concrete fact can ‘exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature’ (PR 20).

To put this in slightly different words: In traditional metaphysics we often find an account of existence in terms of essence, which is thought of as that which makes existence possible. Here we can think, for example, of Plato’s ideas, Aristotle’s

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being as a whole - versus the ontological - the fact that there are beings - but rather that of the familiarity of the words or ideas we use in thinking, and their obscure origin and destiny: where do we get these notions, like ideality or actuality, and what is their real, final meaning? Whitehead would say that they are arrived at through a process of imaginative generalization, but that process already moves within the ‘total metaphysical situation’ itself. Inversely, this means that every speculative philosophy must fall short of its aims in its express statements. Thus the systematicity of philosophy is essentially open and finite, and it acquires its meaning against a background which allows for articulation but cannot be articulated itself.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted from Safranski 1990, p. 24.

second *ousia* over against the *tode ti*, the concrete particular, or Kant's transcendental subjectivity. All Whitehead says is that this does not work; it is the world upside-down. So what we have to do is show how the concrete particular is the place where the sphere of ideality or generality (essentiality) finds expression. The ontological principle, the principle that apart from occasions of experience there is nothing is a statement of the attempt to do just that.

We will first look closer at these two ways of doing metaphysics. We will point out our main criticism of a large part of process philosophy, which is precisely that it continues to give essentialist accounts of existence, in the form of the essence 'process' and we will contrast our reading of Whitehead with the doctrine of the *actus essendi* in Aquinas (where we will restrict ourselves to Geach's presentation of that topic). After that we will discuss Whitehead's speculative philosophy of occasions as we see it, in relation to a number of different topics.

### 3.2 *Categories of Existence*

We have seen in the previous chapter how speculative philosophy, in framing a general scheme interpretative of any and all experience, asks the question 'what is that which exists in the full sense of the word *existence*?', 'what is concrete existence?' The matter is not simply analytical, for though anything whatsoever 'exists' in the sense that it is, in some way or another, the referent of a description, not everything exists in the same way. Existence in the first sense - that of answering a description - is not further analyzable; existence in the second sense of the way in which something exists, is. This second question is the question of speculative philosophy. It is not a question about the contents of the world - say about the different kinds of thing there are, and whether or not there is a highest kind under which all the others are subsumed - but neither is it an empty question. It deals with that which answers descriptions, existence. Speculative philosophy is the analysis of the nature of existence. It answers the question 'What does it mean to be?' In the light of the foregoing, we can say that a first thing to recognize is that the analysis of existence in this sense cannot be a matter of predicating what is essential to it. (The alternative, 'showing how concrete fact can exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet

participated in by its own nature', is what we call 'speculative thought', or 'speculative analysis'.)

To elaborate. Peter Geach makes a case, in various places, of the importance of the distinction between two senses of exist, or to be. He points out that Frege distinguishes carefully between existence in the sense of 'there is a so and so' (*es gibt*) and existence in the sense of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*).<sup>155</sup> The difference may be explained as follows: an individual thing, anything, may be said to 'be', meaning that it is at present<sup>156</sup> actually existing; on the other hand when we say that there is an X, where 'X' stands for a general term, we are saying concerning a certain kind of things, or a certain description of things, that there is at least one thing of that kind or of that description. Geach says that Frege was acutely aware of this distinction but as a mathematical logician, had no interest in the analysis of actuality or presence. For philosophy, though, both notions are of enormous importance. In the philosophy of language we cannot make assertions of present actuality fit the structure of 'there is' assertions, nor write them off as nonsensical; in metaphysics we cannot avoid the question what actuality or as Whitehead would call it 'actual existence' is. (In section 3.4 we will attempt to show how Geach's Fregean reading of Aquinas' theory of the act of being shows an awareness of the possibility and sensibility of the question about '*Wirklichkeit*', but that he falls into the trap of giving an essential account of it.)

If we forget about this specific sense of existence in the sense of *Wirklichkeit*, we find ourselves in a situation where we have, on the one hand, the empty notion of existence as that which satisfies a description, but about which, as such, nothing further can be said, and on the other hand we have the whole realm of reality, the contents of the world. If we then take this distinction, implicitly or explicitly, as

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<sup>155</sup> The reference to *es gibt* and *Wirklichkeit* is in the article 'What Actually Exists', in Geach 1969. See also, for example, Geach's chapter on Aquinas in Anscombe and Geach 1961, p. 90. I will use the sense of *Wirklichkeit* Geach attributes to Frege in what follows because it allows us to bring out the nature of the occasions-analysis. Whether or not Geach was right in his reading of Frege is a matter we will not discuss. But for '*es gibt*': '*Es ist ja Bejahung der Existenz nichts anderes als Verneinung der Nullzahl*' (1884, § 53).

<sup>156</sup> The term 'at present', of course, is used on credit and awaits an analysis of temporality and presence; here the term is used to indicate the circumstance that something is actually now existing - i.e. is present; nothing further is as yet implied. It is enough if we see that this 'circumstance' is relevant to philosophy, and can be dealt with philosophically.

basic, we are sure to miss what Whitehead is doing. The speculative scheme cannot be taken as an analysis of being in this weak sense, for that is nonsensical, so, some claim, the scheme must be a general description of the kinds of things there are. This last option is, indeed, ubiquitous in the literature on Whitehead.<sup>157</sup>

However, seen from the perspective of the question as to the nature of actual existence (actuality), the scheme of *Process and Reality* is not simply a story about a special kind of thing, actual entities, a name for what there is, described as acts of experience or the really real things, of which there are a whole lot, and which, because there really isn't anything else, can be said to be all there is. This way of reading the metaphysics would mean that the job for the philosopher is to spell out how we can reduce our common sense experience, called 'abstractive' in nature, to this level of actual entities, of the real things that are really there. We end up in a reductionist way of thinking that can only leave us wondering what could be the point of Whitehead's talk about misplaced concreteness, not to mention his philosophy, if human experience, even a great variety of human experience, cannot be credited with actuality<sup>158</sup> (which on this reductionist reading evidently is the case because it posits the actual entities, thought of as a kind of spatio-temporal atoms, as the contents of the world, at the cost of those contents that aren't actual entities). Here the term 'actual entity', instead of playing a role in a speculative analysis of existence, has come to be a *name for a certain kind of thing*, namely short-lived, self-contained moments of experience, to which our more elaborate experience of tables, chairs and persons is to be reduced.<sup>159</sup>

*Categories of existence* (listed on PR 22), then, are not *kinds of existents*, but the distinctions we can find within that which exists in the full sense. They are the types of form we find in occasions, not the essence of existence. Apart from actual entities

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<sup>157</sup> For a very clear statement of this position, and its central presence in process philosophy, see Kim and Sosa 1995, entry 'process philosophy'; cp. footnote 59. Though the claim that 'several if not all of the major elements of our ontological repertoire (God, nature as a whole, persons, material substances) are best understood in process-linked terms' may, or may not, be true it, begs the question on the matter of actual existence.

<sup>158</sup> A point made by Bradford Wallack (1980, p. 32).

<sup>159</sup> In this interpretation, one could say that here one form of scientism - scientific materialism - has been replaced by another - scientific mentalism.

there is nothing. Just as in Aristotle the categories are the modes of predication that pertain to what truly exists, namely *ousia*, so in Whitehead the categories of existence indicate what can be said about that which truly exists. For example, in Aristotle an accident or a relation has no actual existence itself, but derives its being from the substance it modifies. This relation of 'derivation' is thought of as analogically characterizable (thus 'being' is predicated analogically of accidents and relations).

The problems associated with the concept of analogy are of no immediate concern to us here for the question of metaphysics is primarily about the nature of that which exists concretely; not about the logical status of categoreal distinctions. Of course, any adequate speculative philosophy must be able to interpret the logical status of categoreal distinctions in its terms but logic itself cannot be the basis of speculative thought. We can use logic as a means of ascertaining the consequences of certain hypotheses<sup>160</sup>, and speculative thought is subject to the criteria of logical perfection (PR 3), but logic is a tentative procedure when applied to concrete instances (MT 106), and itself open to speculative criticism.

Whitehead gives two examples of this. First, he notes how Aristotelian logic is based on the metaphysical notion of 'an entity exemplifying this or that quality, apart from reference to things beyond' (MT 74). In modern deductive logic this starting point is abandoned, but according to Whitehead two equally metaphysical presuppositions take its place. These are (1) that the definite symbols of composition do not alter their meaning as new compositions are formed and (2) that the self-identity of each variable can be preserved when the variable is replaced by a definite instance (MT 107). But in their application to, for example, the analysis of actual existence, these presupposition are less than self-evident<sup>161</sup>, and a decision on our part to take them as de facto presuppositions has to be justified by a reference to experience, in other words to self-evidence if we would want to make deductive logic the basis of metaphysical analysis. But we cannot use deductive logic in establishing the premises of logic. Therefore we

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<sup>160</sup> AE 122.

<sup>161</sup> MT 53-54, 107; ESP 96-99.

dismiss deductive logic as a major instrument for metaphysical discussion. Such discussion is concerned with the eliciting of self-evidence. Apart from such self-evidence, deduction fails. Thus logic presupposes metaphysics. (MT 107)

Speculative metaphysics characterizes concrete existence as 'concrete existence with a formal aspect'. But that is not the analysis of abstractive pattern, as is logic, and indeed science. From the point of view of speculative thought logic and science both play strictly limited roles, and both are forms of the analysis of abstractive pattern:

Science only renders the metaphysical need more urgent. In itself it contributes little directly to the solution of the metaphysical problem<sup>162</sup>. But it does contribute something, namely, the exposition of the fact that our experience of sensible apparent things is capable of being analysed into a scientific theory, a theory not indeed complete, but giving every promise of indefinite expansion. This achievement emphasises *the intimate relation between our logical thought and the facts of sensible apprehension*. Also the special form of scientific theory is bound to have some influence. In the past false science has been the parent of bad metaphysics. After all, science embodies a rigorous scrutiny of one part of the whole evidence from which metaphysicians deduce their conclusions. (AE 155; my italics)

We confuse two orders of understanding if we talk about tables and chairs and substances, or actual entities, in one and the same breath. But in metaphysics there is a bridge from one order to the other, or rather, metaphysics *is* that bridge.<sup>163</sup> For in metaphysics we try to 'connect the *behaviour* of things with the *formal nature*<sup>164</sup> of things' (PR 94; emphasis in the original). This formal nature is expressed by the categoreal structure of existence, at which we arrive by generalizing from the observed behaviour of things around and within us. For example, present actuality as introduced above, is part of the formal nature of things, in the sense employed in the quotation. It is part of the categoreal determination of what it is to be - to be means in part to be presently actual - and a further understanding of this is couched

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<sup>162</sup> 'The determination of the nature of what truly exists', AE 123. (JS)

<sup>163</sup> Under threat of repeating myself: this is another way of putting what is meant by saying metaphysics deals with existence in the concrete.

<sup>164</sup> NB. In the previous paragraph 'formal' was used in the sense of 'generalities inherent in things'. Here 'formal nature' means what a thing is in itself, an actual entity considered as that 'individual entity with its own measure of absolute self-realization' (PR 51, 219). Also AI 176, where the analysis

in terms of our experience of the behaviour of things: things come into existence, last for a while and perish; things can be perceivable or unperceivable; things can be present as being absent, etc. Although a distinction between the formal and the generic<sup>165</sup> must be made if we are not to overlook what speculative philosophy is about, and consequently what terms like ‘actual entity’ signify, the acceptance of the distinction immediately loosens it, because our speculative understanding lives off the reflection into each other of the two sides of the distinction.

Experience precedes thought; the concepts we use in philosophy are derived by generalization from salient features of our experience. Words like ‘actuality’, ‘existence’, ‘being’, ‘experience’ or ‘occasion’, when used in metaphysics, are themselves generalized from an experiential basis. ‘Actuality’ signals primarily what is acting, what is working. ‘Existence’ that which ‘stands out’, so that it can be noticed, or can enter into relations with others; ‘being’, we have already indicated it, is generalized from what is presently actual. The fact that these generalizations *work*, at least to some extent, shows that by their aid we really do capture something meaningful, but neither one of them can claim any a priori evidence. Only an imaginative generalization, which answers to what these words mean, can learn us their limits of applicability.

### *3.3 Two Forms of Metaphysics*

We cannot read Whitehead’s metaphysics as ‘realist’ in the pre-Kantian, pre-critical sense of the word, as offering a description of the metaphysical contents of the world. Yet, as indicated before<sup>166</sup>, in the literature, this reading is pervasive. Even if we allow for a less absolute opposition between generic and formal analysis, as argued in the previous section, than customary, and grant speculative metaphysics its generic aspect, we still cannot overlook, for any speculative scheme, the necessity

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of experience in terms of related acts of self-realization is called ‘formal’, as opposed to the description of experience in terms of concern.

<sup>165</sup> In the sense of ‘pertaining to genera and species’.

<sup>166</sup> Cp. 1.3.



of addressing the question of being, of what it is to exist *formaliter*. The answer to this question incorporates not only an account of what it is to be *simpliciter*, being as it pertains to anything whatsoever - this Whitehead calls 'reality'; it also contains an account of the nature of that which 'exists in the full sense beyond which there is no other', of concrete existence ('*Wirklichkeit*', as we have been using the word):

The Aristotelian doctrine, that all agency is confined to actuality, is accepted. So also is the Platonic dictum that the very meaning of existence is 'to be a factor in agency', or in other words 'to make a difference'. Thus, 'to be something' is to be discoverable as a factor in the analysis of some actuality. It follows that in one sense everything is 'real', according to its own category of being. In this sense the word 'real' can only mean that some sound or mark is a word with a denotation. But the term 'realization' refers to the actual entities which include the entity in question as a positive factor in their constitutions. (AI 197)<sup>167</sup>

Whitehead acknowledges, as does Aristotle, that there is something like being in the primary sense - actual existence, and more derivative forms of being. There are several *categories* of being.<sup>168</sup> This is not an a priori insight, but a tentative formulation, a metaphysical hypothesis framed on the basis of reflective experience (this in line with the general methodology of speculative metaphysics<sup>169</sup>). The meaning of being that pertains to all the categories in common ('real') is almost empty; it contains no more than the notion that some sound or mark is a word with a denotation.<sup>170</sup> The meaning of being as it pertains to the ontologically primary category, actual entity, is the proper subject of the occasions-analysis.

Whitehead uses the conceptuality of process and event for the analysis of concrete, actual existence. In Rescher's introduction to process metaphysics (1996) we find an apt statement of what this can be thought to imply (and has been thought to

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<sup>167</sup> We may complete this statement by remarking that there is more to be said about the meaning of 'real' than that some sign has a denotation. Whitehead distinguishes between entities and actual entities. The definition of an entity is given in the 'principle of relativity' (PR 22): '[T]he potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is the one general metaphysical character attaching to all entities, actual and non-actual. . . . In other words, it belongs to the nature of a "being" that it is a potential for every "becoming".'

<sup>168</sup> PR 22 lists eight.

<sup>169</sup> Cp. ch. 2.

<sup>170</sup> This follows from the ontological principle; cp. 2.3.4.

imply by the vast majority of writers in this field<sup>171</sup>). A comparison of Rescher's survey of process philosophy with my interpretation may help to further clarify my point.

Apparently, Rescher, and with him the majority of process philosophers, use the conceptuality of process and event in the framework of a *reductionist program* in metaphysics, in which the upside-down procedure of traditional metaphysics (mentioned in 3.1) takes the form of assigning ontological primacy to a kind of thing, defined by an essence, namely processes. The analysis of concreteness and the reductionist program in metaphysics are fundamentally at odds.

In process metaphysics the idea that reality has to be understood in process-linked terms, or, equivalently, in terms of the concept of event, is basic. This is often presented as in explicit opposition to what classical metaphysics holds to be the basic furniture of the world, *viz.* medium sized material particulars, called 'substances' (or

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<sup>171</sup> Challenging the pre-critical realism of Whitehead interpretation means challenging the vast majority of Whiteheadians. For an overview of the literature from this perspective see Bradford Wallack's meticulous survey (1980). I do not agree with her that 'any concrete existent whatsoever' (p. 7) in the sense of what we commonly take to be concrete existents, is an actual entity, but I do agree completely with her that construing Whitehead's concrete entities as tiny impalpable building blocks of the world, a substratum for reduction, amounts to no more than a repetition of scientism, Whitehead's avowed antagonist (so that even only on that account it cannot be a faithful representation of Whitehead's philosophy) and fails to see the point of the occasions-analysis of experience. Bradford Wallack's interpretation was hardly taken up by anyone, but Bradley (1985) was early to recognize its decisive importance and suggests, by way of emendation, that we take 'actual entity' to be the name of a descriptive model of what is real. But this would force upon us an infinite draw on analogy which reduces the model to insignificance. As already indicated, the claim that the occasions-analysis tells us what it is to be actual, what the actuality of something consists in, has a formal and a material side (or, even better, it comprises and surpasses the formal and the material in the speculative, coherent scheme). In Bradley 1994 we find the proposal to see the entire scheme (including the category of actual entity) as transcendental, in the medieval sense insofar as it is a completely general description of what makes an entity an entity and in the Kantian sense insofar as it assigns a primary place to becoming as the self-constitution of experience. From the standpoint of the present analysis we may agree with these claims, but we must also remark that transcendentalism is a subspecies of speculative philosophy. Invoking Kant or Aquinas does not relieve us of the task of giving an account in Whitehead's own terms of what speculative thinking is, and the divergence between Aquinas, Kant and Whitehead are no less telling than the similarities. For a discussion of these, see Bradley *op. cit.*, pp. 161-163. Also, we want to point out that it is difficult to continue to use the term 'transcendental' in a form of metaphysics that denies the ultimacy of the phenomenal-noumenal distinction ('nothing behind the veil'). The point of saying that occasions aren't in the (empirical) world is not that they are behind it as conditions of possibility of experience; with the occasions-analysis the concept of the empirical world is redefined: 'world' is nothing outside of occasions, *therefore* occasions are misrepresented when we say they are in the world.

‘things’)<sup>172</sup>, or, in any form of scientific materialism, tiny bits of matter. What unites these two (classical substance metaphysics and scientific materialism) is the idea that what is ultimately real is a continuant that undergoes change but remains what it is - in a way, temporal aspects are extrinsic to its identity criteria - whereas process metaphysics generalizes the phenomenon of change and the aspect of temporality and, in so doing, develops the idea that the basic furniture of the world consists of processes or events (i.e. intrinsically temporalized units), in terms of which our ‘basic ontological repertoire’ as Rescher calls it, has to be understood. There are some things that we would want to count as real that can only be adequately categorized if we substitute processes for substances: ‘Clearly, storms and heat waves are every bit as real as dogs and oranges.’<sup>173</sup> But things like ‘the feel of the place’, moods and modes of occurrence, historicity and last but not least human existence, receive a rather Procrustean treatment in substance metaphysics as well.

Also, traditional oppositions such as mind-body, one-many, necessity-spontaneity, individuality-relatedness can be reconciled in the sense that both sides of these oppositions are inherent in process, and required by each other within process. On this point Rescher quotes John Dewey:

It may be the continued working of the Hegelian bacillus of reconciliation in me, that makes me feel as if the conception of process gives a basis for uniting the truths of pluralism and monism, and also of necessity and spontaneity.... I cannot help feeling that an adequate analysis of activity would exhibit the world of fact, and the world of ideas as two corresponding objective statements (Dewey means *expressions*) of the active process itself, - correspondent because each has a work to do in the doing of which it needs to be helped by the other. (p. 4)

Apart from this, another important reason for developing a process ontology (which from an everyday, common sense point of view despite everything still seems rather out of the way) lies precisely in the task of metaphysics as Rescher conceives it:

One of the characteristic tasks of metaphysics is to articulate the set of concepts and ideational perspectives able to provide a thought-framework for

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<sup>172</sup> Cp. Aristotle, *Categories* 2b5, ‘the individual man or horse’.

<sup>173</sup> Rescher *op. cit.*, p. 29.

understanding the world about us and our place within it. Such a metaphysical framework need not, of course, be designed to *compete* with the resources afforded us by everyday knowledge and scientific understanding, but can - indeed, should - absorb and supplement them within one comprehensive and harmonious overarching perspective.

Process metaphysics affords one of the most promising and convenient avenues towards realizing this objective. As a venture in what is generally called 'speculative metaphysics', process philosophy regards the domain of human knowledge as an organically integrated self-sustaining whole. It does not seek to domineer over - let alone to displace! - our manifold of scientific knowledge, but rather strives to accommodate it. From its angle, the key task of philosophical inquiry is to develop a set of concepts and principles that makes it possible to devise a synoptic and unified yet detailed and substantively adequate descriptive and explanatory account that at once integrates and illuminates our cognitive attainments in science.

Process philosophy here meets with substantial success. Perhaps more effectively than any rival theory, the manifold of ideas revolving around process and activity provides the philosophical resources that enable us to characterize and render intelligible the world's developments as best we can discern them. . . .

Process metaphysics as a general line of approach holds that physical existence is at bottom processual; that processes rather than things best represent phenomena that we encounter in the natural world about us. (pp. 1-2)

At this point the distinction between the reductionist or essentialist (note how Rescher talks about metaphysics as a 'set of concepts and ideational perspectives') and the speculative types of metaphysical theory becomes relevant. Both are open-ended, fallible, open to revision and tentative - as far as this is concerned, they both take the traditional definition of metaphysics as the systematic inquiry into the necessary and general structures, elements and characteristics of any possible universe self-consciously for what it is, a goal and not a starting point - but they differ in a crucial aspect. The difference amounts to this: metaphysics in the reductionist manner will try to reduce our everyday opinions about the metaphysical makeup of the world to as few as possible basic categories of entities, and will explain other categories as somehow made up of, or emergent upon, those basic categories. Thus, the question as to what actually, really, exists is (a) meaningful and (b) answered by pointing out the entities that are the 'really reals'; the rest is appearance, or construction, or whatever, but it is not part of full-blooded

existence. Examples of this line of thought can readily be found in various brands of scientific materialism but it also features prominently in much early modern thought.

Metaphysics in the speculative manner, on the other hand, will allow for a basic sense of being in which anything we find or encounter or perceive can be said to *be* (Whitehead would use the word 'real' (AI 197)) and it will then pursue two distinct lines. The first one is to provide a generic description of the types of thing there are in the world, and their interrelations. This is an important part of metaphysics, and the elaboration of a categorial account of processes and events is only in its beginning stages. The second line pursues the question: what can be said about the nature of actual existence as such? Anything that is said here is of a speculative character. (Sometimes called 'transcendental', in both the medieval and the Kantian sense of the word. For, what can be said about actual existence as such (about 'the fact of the reality of an event in itself' (SMW 93)), pertains to all actual existents simply on account of the fact that they are, that they exist. This is the meaning of 'transcendental' as it is used by the medieval logicians and metaphysicians.<sup>174</sup> But anything that is said by way of an answer to the question 'What is actual existence?' serves as a condition for actualisation as well, much as the transcendental in Kant serves as the condition for possible experience - for experience, it has been said, is always actualisation. But we must note that the transcendental turn, in providing a categorial or predicative account of actual existence, still falls short of the demand not to explain concreteness by adding up universals.)

Actual existence in this sense (corresponding to the second line pursued by speculative metaphysics) was recognized, as indicated above, by Frege to be a legitimate use of words but we think it is safe to say that it is precisely this sense of 'to be' that has suffered most from the anti-metaphysical climate of the past century, among other things accounting for the fact that today we understand metaphysics largely as a generic theory about types of entities and their relations. But if we ask how all these different categories of existence are together in beings (for surely that is

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<sup>174</sup> The transcendental predicates are predicated analogically of the different categories of being; the category of substance (*ousia*) is the prime analogon.

what they are)<sup>175</sup> we either go the way of reductionism (explaining away), or else we have to take the speculative turn.

If we take process metaphysics as claiming that processes rather than things best represent the phenomena that we encounter, we interpret the claims of process metaphysics as forming a chapter in reductionist metaphysics<sup>176</sup>. What is really real is not the world as we live in it and perceive it, but rather processes interacting in all sorts of ways. We are pointing out a *kind of object* as the fundamental, ultimately and only actual kind of object, as *explaining what it is to be an object*, and thereby such a theory, because it is explicitly designed to accommodate and interpret all fields of human knowledge, tells us *what the world is really like*. Our everyday talk about things and persons can remain as it is - the process philosopher is not suggesting that instead of 'this pen' one should speak of 'this instance of a pen process', as Rescher says<sup>177</sup>, but he is insisting that the latter form of statement is the more concrete one, the one that is more true to the way things *really* are. As I will argue later however, the very distinction between ordinary everyday experience and 'the way things really are' has come about because of the substance analysis of actual existence.<sup>178</sup>

In metaphysical reductionism, the difficulties one encounters when trying to explain everything in terms of substance are met, not by lifting the discussion to a higher level, but simply by substituting 'event', or 'process' for 'substance'. Naturally, this means that what you gain on the one hand, you lose on the other.<sup>179</sup> For in a metaphysics of individual, separate, enduring entities there are things that cannot be adequately accounted for, such as connectedness, temporality, happenings without particulars (the weather) or the logical structure of event describing

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<sup>175</sup> The metaphysical analysis of causality, unity, plurality, presence, temporality belong in this line.

<sup>176</sup> A term Rescher himself uses, see *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>177</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>178</sup> Cp. also 1.1, 'The Hardest Thought'.

<sup>179</sup> If this is what speculative metaphysics does, instead of being too philosophical, it would not be philosophical enough; it is always one-sided; hence its dogmatic nature. This criticism was given by A.E. Murphy (1941). From our position the answer is obvious: this is not what speculative metaphysicians do. Quite apart from any considerations about the nature of speculative philosophy, however, we may add that assigning ontological primacy to one category rather than another *only* obliges one to construct an experientially adequate account of how the other categories are to be related to the primary one. This has constituted a continuous project of philosophical analysis ever since Aristotle.

propositions ('He buttered the toast carefully and deliberately'<sup>180</sup>); but in a metaphysics that alleviates these drawbacks by making process basic, the permanences of the world don't sit comfortably.<sup>181</sup> My claim is, that this way of putting things amounts to a false dilemma between having to choose for substances, or for processes, and that this false dilemma is the consequence of the essentialist, reductionistic interpretation of metaphysics. The most you could say, is that events and substances are equally basic, that is, they cannot be reduced one to the other. Both are needed in an account of the structure of reality that fits with our experience. Of course, this conclusion leads to another question: For, if there is a multiplicity of basics in a theory (any theory), the question as to what constitutes the unity of the multiplicity of basics has to be posed. An explanation of a phenomenon (in the case of metaphysics, an explanation of what it is to be real) that ends by simply listing a set of disconnected basic items is flawed in a fundamental way. Somehow or other the *unity* of the phenomenon has got to be accounted for. Real unities are more than a mere collective disjunction of component elements.<sup>182</sup> Here we cross the border of the empirical, and we enter the region of the speculative (in the sense of an explication of what is implied in concrete existence). For *adding another element* to perform the role of glue will not help.<sup>183</sup> The unity of the thing lies in its concrete existence, but concrete existence is not, so to speak, on the same level as the component

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<sup>180</sup> The example is Davidson's; See Rescher *op. cit.*, pp. 175ff.

<sup>181</sup> Moreover, questions about the transcategorical features (unity, plurality, causality etc.) appear untouched by this move.

<sup>182</sup> PR 229.

<sup>183</sup> This is why, in the analysis of the unity of experience, the introduction of relations or relatedness begs the question if, at the same time, we keep holding on to substances. PR 229: 'relations . . . are . . . apings of reality', they 'fail to connect'. Only when we move to a conception where relationality is basic in the sense that the occasions are nothing but connections of connections do we evade the 'problem of the glue'. Cp. AI 230-231:

This consideration is the basis of Bradley's objection that relations do not relate. Three towns and an abstract universal are not three connected towns. A doctrine of connectedness is wanted. Bradley writes (*Essays on Truth and Reality*, ch. VI, app.) 'Is there, in the end, such a thing as a relation which is merely *between* terms? Or, on the other hand, does not a relation imply an underlying unity and an inclusive whole?' Bradley's 'inclusive whole' is the connectedness of which we are in search.

What holds for the connectedness of terms also holds for the unity of the inclusive whole. Its analysis cannot be one in terms of related elements; Whitehead says it should be in terms of coherent notions, a concept we have examined at length in chapter 2.

elements. Again: metaphysics does not *explain* concreteness, because it cannot be explained. The question how concrete fact can be built up out of universals is a complete mistake (PR 20).

For Leibniz, one of the philosophers Rescher counts among the process group, the monads perform the role of accounting for the reality of things, of affording an analysis of what it is to exist. They are required by the world. I think we find a similar thing in Whitehead. His processes, actual entities as he calls them, are ‘acts of becoming’ or ‘concrescences’, a word he explains by pointing out its root-sense of a ‘growing together’. They are not so much contents of the world; they explain what the concepts ‘contents’ and ‘world’ mean when applied to what actually exists.<sup>184</sup> In the analysis of the structure of reality we have to have, apart from an analysis of the kinds of thing there are, and their connections, an analysis of what it is to be as such. And, where in classical metaphysics to be as such was understood as ‘to be in act’, where ‘act’ is the ‘actualization’ of an in itself static, determinate, independent essence, in process metaphysics to be is understood as ‘to be in process’, to happen. Where ‘to be in act’ pertains to a ‘something’ which is acting, ‘to be in process’ does not. In process, being is acting.<sup>185</sup> Here lies the real divergence between substance metaphysics and process metaphysics: in the former to be real is analysed as to be an actualized essence, whereas in the latter to be real is analysed as to be self-actualizing, that is self-determining. Thus an occasion is the place where essences find expression; we do not understand an instance of whiteness from whiteness itself, but the other way around.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Here we can easily see how the charge of pre-Kantianism comes about. For we could be led to take the acts as substrates of what appears, as world, as content. That is not what is intended. Remember Whitehead’s radical empiricism. We start with concrete experience and interpret the appearance-reality distinction within the realm of experience, not as in one sense or other ‘before’ it. Whitehead’s own remark that his philosophy is a recurrence to pre-Kantian modes of thought (PR xi) cannot be understood apart from the statement made in the next sentences that the pre-Kantian philosophers tended to abandon those elements in their thought upon which Whitehead bases himself (namely the organic character of experience). The upshot of this is that Whitehead saw the occasions-analysis as the more cogent, intelligible, rational alternative to Kant’s transcendental subjectivity, and Kant’s philosophy as an unnecessary move motivated by the substance-quality form of metaphysical analysis. Cp. PR xiii, 144-156, and, for a critical discussion of Whitehead’s reading of Kant, a.o. Lucas 1989, pp. 73-92.

<sup>185</sup> Cp. Leclerc 1961a, p. 179.

<sup>186</sup> Cp. next section.



But the clarification of concrete, actual existence is not, as I have already indicated, a matter of explaining it by what it is not. Here we have to decide. Either we go with the speculative metaphysician and acknowledge the fact that the search for understanding from here takes on a different form from scientific explanatory procedures (in other words, metaphysical structure is not quite like empirical structure), or we part company, and go with Rescher *cum suis*.

One consequence of this difference, already indicated above, is that we have to use words which have their origin in everyday, common sense thinking, such as for example the word 'event' to try and come to grips with what forms the condition of the ubiquitous character of reality as we ordinarily experience it. As Whitehead said, the actual world can never be caught taking a holiday from the sway of the basic metaphysical principles (PR 4). This constitutes an inherent difficulty for metaphysics: we have to stretch the meanings of words to a degree of generality that is absent from their meanings in ordinary language - but it doesn't constitute a knock-down argument against its possibility, at least, if we do not insist on immediate finality of statement. For there is a criterion we can use in doing metaphysics: since we are living in reality, and are part of it, we can negatively conclude that a metaphysical theory has at least to be able to interpret any and all experience coherently.<sup>187</sup> Any type of metaphysical theory that refuses to discuss the nature of actual existence and in doing so neglects its importance, thereby committing itself to a reductionist account of reality as such in terms of one, or a few kinds of reals, fails on this criterion. (This is merely another way of looking at the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness'.)

Reductionism, either in the ontological sense of seeing all things as reducible to other kinds of things, or in the conceptual sense of seeing the idea of something as

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<sup>187</sup> Whitehead speaks of a coherent system of general notions (cp. chapter 2), from which we might conclude that he is indeed at one in his conception of metaphysics with Rescher (cp. the definition quoted above: metaphysics develops 'the set of concepts and ideational perspectives able to provide a thought-framework for understanding the world about us and our place within it'). But part of such a system is an account of the nature of generality vis-à-vis concrete existence, a concern which permeates Whitehead's writings and is absent in Rescher's account (an uncritically adumbrated remnant of it is the reductionist thesis).

necessarily involving a recourse, a reduction in the definition, to another idea, misses out precisely on that which enables metaphysics to occupy a fruitful position as accommodator of specialist knowledge and experience without taking on the hideous characteristics of a super-science, namely the analysis of actual, concrete existence. Such analysis is not an explanation, effected by indicating the aspects that go to make it up, rather, it states that in terms of which all explanation must occur. It exhibits the 'fusion of analysis with actuality' (ESP 86), it exhibits that an occasion is not an actualized essence (with all the consequences for the nature of speculative thinking; its specific form ('exhibition') is the counterpart of the concept of an occasion). It describes the structure of actuality, it does not seek to uncover the hidden realities behind the appearances. That dichotomy has lost its status as a fundamental opposition in metaphysical analysis. Without denying their real value, I conclude that on this matter both Rescher's *Introduction*, as well as large sections of process philosophy, remain in the dark.

### 3.4 Actual Existence and the Act of Being: A Comparison

We have seen how essentialist metaphysics works either by a reduction of kinds of existents to one specific kind, in oblivion or neglect of the sense of actual existence referred to by *Wirklichkeit* (Frege-Geach), or by an account in terms of essential structure of actual existence in this sense. As an example and discussion of this second approach, we want to contrast the occasions-analysis with a particular interpretation of the doctrine of *actus essendi*, as it has been developed in Thomist metaphysics. We mean Geach's discussion of this doctrine in his article 'Form and Existence'.<sup>188</sup> We are not so much concerned with historic accuracy or an exhaustive discussion of this chapter in Thomist metaphysics, we merely want to portray the differences between Whitehead's analysis, and the Thomist one. We restrict ourselves to Geach's article because it allows us to bring out the differences with the

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<sup>188</sup> In Geach 1969, pp. 42-64; in my exposition of the article numbers in round brackets refer to page numbers of the article. In this section, I summarize a part of Geach's article quite literally, *viz.* the part that has to do with the analysis of *esse*, or the *actus essendi*, as the *id quo* of the *ens*. After the summary I confront the '*id quo*'-analysis with Whitehead's analysis, which has to be sharply critical of the very concept of an '*id quo*' in the realm of the question of being.

occasions-analysis quite clearly, although I have no indication that Geach had Whitehead in the back of his mind while writing the article, and there is every reason to think he didn't.<sup>189</sup> I take both analyses as ways of answering the question of the meaning of being.

If we want to give a prephilosophical indication of what is involved in asking the question about the meaning of 'being', we can think of the inexhaustible fullness of particular, concrete things, goings-on and persons, of the irreplaceable uniqueness and individuality of our actions, our sufferings and our enjoyments. These have to do with the atmosphere in Plato's dialogues, characterized by Murdoch as open, happy, sunny, and by Whitehead as 'suffused with the implicit suggestion of the concrete unity of experience'<sup>190</sup>; it is, in Bertrand Russell's catching phrase, the feeling of reality. We may seek an intellectual understanding of this 'feeling of reality', we may seek to establish the position it occupies within our thinking, and we may try to answer the question what the meaning of reality as such, of being, is. No doubt, these questions are important, for they are concerned with getting to understand the lives we live, getting to understand who we are. But also there can be no doubt that the way philosophical questions like these are posed, and the way they are dealt with, differ widely from the scientific procedures that hold sway in our intellectual culture. For (1) questions of value are here intrinsically bound up with questions of fact and (2) these ontological questions do not have the form of scientific questions. They leave nothing out. They do not inquire after abstract coordinations nor do they arise from the observation of regular changes. In Thomist metaphysics this pre-philosophical set of reflections receives a metaphysical treatment in the theory of *actus essendi*, the act of being.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> He does, however, criticize some typical examples of Whiteheadian terminology, like 'eternal object' or 'inherence', without referring to Whitehead. Geach's article has been the subject of some debate in analytical philosophy. See Williams 1981. I will not trace this debate since it takes the discussion in quite a different direction.

<sup>190</sup> Murdoch 1992, p. 148; Whitehead, ESP 86.

<sup>191</sup> Following Bradley (1994, p. 155) we may distinguish between so-called 'weak' and so-called 'strong' philosophical answers to the question of being. Weak answers we find for example in Hume and Kant. Weak accounts of being hold that the 'is' of existence is exhaustively analysed as the 'is' of real predication, identity or instantiation. After that nothing more can be said about it. Being is the 'silent, featureless pendant of propositional functions', as Bradley strikingly puts it. Strong answers to the question of being we find, for example, in Thomas and Whitehead. The strong answer says that

The terms *esse* (being, to be), *actus essendi* (act of existing) and *quo aliquid est* (that by which a thing is (or: exists)) are used as synonyms by Aquinas. The last suggests a convenient division: we can discuss the meaning of *quo*, that by which, and then the meaning of *est*, that is, the kind of existential proposition that is involved in the doctrine of *esse*. But, Geach writes, we cannot arrive at the meaning of the whole phrase simply by combining the separate considerations about *quo* and *est* (42). We will presently turn to the question why this is so, now we look at *quo* and *est*.

*Quo* can be used with all sorts of predicates, for example: ‘quo Socrates albus est’ - that by which Socrates is white. This phrase is synonymous with ‘albedo Socratis’ - the whiteness of Socrates. Either phrase designates what Aquinas calls ‘forms’. According to Aquinas, there is a real distinction between the form and the self-subsistent individual (the suppositum) whose form it is. This distinction comes out clearly in the distinction between logical subject and logical predicate. There are strong ‘prejudices’ (43) against allowing that this distinction answers to any real distinction, however. Indeed, Whitehead does not deny altogether that the ‘subject-predicate form of proposition’ corresponds to a real distinction, but he severely limits its relevance to metaphysical description, insisting that ‘[t]he evil produced by the Aristotelian “primary substance” is exactly this habit of metaphysical emphasis upon the “subject-predicate” form of proposition’ (PR 30).

How can we show the correspondence of the structure of logical subject-logical predicate to a distinction *in rebus*, between supposit and form? Well, first of all we must realize that we are not dealing with two different types of entity. It is not as though terms in logical subject position (‘names’) signify other things than the predicate terms. This would immediately lead to the reification of what predicates stand for into a separate realm of eternal objects, with all the paradoxes involved. Predicates are not names.

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the term being indicates the fundamental activity or act of being of things in virtue of which they are what they are. But, at least that follows from what we have been saying throughout this study, the use that we make of words in giving the strong answer is speculative, and thereby itself not understandable as a form of real predication, instantiation or identity.

Yet, they do stand for something, namely 'forms', and, what is more, there is a sharp and rigid distinction between these 'forms' and the individuals, the supposita, whose names can enter into subject-position. 'It is only to what a predicative expression stands for that we can, even falsely, ascribe manyness. What can be repeated is always and only a common nature' (45).

Now according to this doctrine, to be means to be a single suppositum with a definite set of forms. The suppositum is 'ens'; the form is rather 'entis' than 'ens' (48). It is in itself incomplete, or of derivative actuality. It is, as Frege said, '*ergänzungsbedürftig*'. So it is better to talk about 'red of ...' than about 'red'. 'Red' simpliciter is an abstraction, which must at all times be reducible to the concrete predicates of which it is derived: 'a sentence with an irreducible abstract "proper name" in it (say: "Redness is an eternal object") is nonsense' (47).

The distinction is the same as Frege's distinction between 'Gegenstand' and 'Begriff'. Both are objective, in the sense of not involving any form of conceptualism, but only a 'Begriff' admits of repetition and manyness: 'Ein Gegenstand kommt nicht wiederholt vor, sondern mehre Gegenstände fallen unter einen Begriff.'<sup>192</sup>

But it still is possible to talk about forms, to talk about red etc. So it is possible to put the predicative expressions that stand for forms in subject position. How can this be done, while avoiding the pitfall of Platonism? - a question expressly urgent since a large part of the critique of Platonism is derived from an analysis of the subject-predicate form of proposition.

At this point, the function enters the discussion. Geach says, that, when putting a predicative expression, an abstract noun, in subject position, the abstract noun cannot be the whole subject. The form is signified by an abstract noun 'in recto' and a mention, 'in obliquo', of the individual whose form it is. So: 'The wisdom of Socrates' and 'the redness of Socrates' nose' give us designations of forms, but the spurious proper names 'wisdom' and 'redness' do not (48).

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<sup>192</sup> Frege 1884, § 51.

We must not, however, analyse ‘the wisdom of Socrates’ as ‘wisdom that Socrates possesses’. This leads us straight back to Platonism, and even of a mythical kind since we have involved ourselves with the dubious relation of ‘possession’. ‘The wisdom of Socrates’ comes apart in ‘wisdom of ...’ and ‘Socrates’. ‘Of’ is a logically inseparable part of the sign ‘wisdom of ...’, indicating the need to put a name after this sign. Now we understand the synonymous character of ‘quo Socrates albus est’ and ‘albedo Socratis’ (cp. above): What refers to a form is ‘the wisdom of ...’, not the whole phrase ‘the wisdom of Socrates’; ‘the wisdom of ...’ needs to be completed with a name of something that has the form, just as the predicate ‘... is wise’, which also stands for this form, needs to be completed by a subject (48). The two types of phrase share the same structure of the propositional function:  $P(x)$ .<sup>193</sup>

It may look rather odd that a form cannot be designated by an abstract noun alone or by a noun phrase. It may seem a case of putting reality on the theory’s bed of Procrustes. But logical form isn’t identical with syntactical form, and Geach illustrates this with the notion of a mathematical function: ‘Neither the isolated square-root sign nor (say) “ $\sqrt{25}$ ” designates a function, but rather the circumstance that the square-root sign is followed by some numeral or other’ (49).

The analogy of predicates and mathematical functions has its origins in Frege, who explicitly conceived of *Begriffe* as functions, carrying the values ‘true’ and ‘false’. The analogy enables us to understand, that the ‘of’ in ‘the wisdom of Socrates’ does not stand for a relation of inherence, belonging or possessing.

For consider: ‘the square root of 25’ does not mean: ‘that one among square roots which belongs to 25’, so the question how one number can ‘belong’ to another, does not arise. ‘The square root of 25’ refers to 5, just as ‘5’, or ‘the product of 5 and 1’. In Frege’s terms: the *Bedeutung* is the same, the *Sinn* not.

It is the same with ‘the wisdom of Socrates’. Someone who understands this phrase, doesn’t have to understand the mythical relation of inherence. The term

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<sup>193</sup> This is not to deny the huge difference between the two types of phrase, the one being a noun phrase, the other a proposition, or judgement if you will. But this difference arises from the way we talk about the form, and not from a difference in the form we are talking about.

‘wisdom’ demands of itself a genitive to complete its sense, in much the same way as the term ‘square root’.

The mathematical analogy also helps explain that the phrase ‘the wisdom of Socrates’ does not signify a form simpliciter, but a form of Socrates, a form occurring in Socrates. The number 5 is not the square-root function, but it is that function of 25. ‘What designates a form is not the whole phrase “the wisdom of Socrates”, but merely “the wisdom of ...” - although without completion this latter phrase is senseless’ (50). Note that the abstract noun ‘wisdom’ is not meaningless, but it does operate on borrowed assets. The abstract noun has to be replaceable by the larger phrases of which it is derived. The derivation is part of its meaning. But ‘redness’ or ‘wisdom’ as such, are abstractions. There is the redness of this, the redness of that, etc. but redness in itself does not have separate existence.

Phrases with *quo*, a noun subject and an ordinary predicate signify forms, just as do the phrases consisting of an abstract noun followed by a noun in genitive case: ‘Quo Socrates albus est’, ‘albedo Socratis’. We have seen the underlying structure of synonymy between the two. *Quo* - that by which - indicates a form, which can also be indicated by an abstract noun standing in need of completion by a noun in the genitive case - a Fregean function.

Now, in the case of *esse*, also an abstract noun, we get the phrase *quo aliquid est*. Thus, the question ‘What is being?’ would be synonymous with the question ‘What is that by which a thing is?’, where we may expect that ‘that by which’ signifies as little a separate entity as in the case of *quo* with an ordinary predicate. But does it signify a form, thereby allowing us to understand the actus essendi in terms of a functional analysis? And what would this form ‘the being of ...’ be? Are we not going a bridge too far, trying to grasp being as a form of a suppositum?

What is the meaning of the predicate ‘est’? Geach gives (55) three different kinds of use of ‘is’, exemplified in the following (negative) existential propositions:

- A. There is no such thing as Cerberus; Cerberus does not exist, is not real.
- B. There is no such thing as a dragon; dragons do not exist.
- C. Joseph is not and Simeon is not.

Of the A kind, we can say that 'is' is not being used as a predicate. The sentence is not 'about' Cerberus, in the sense that the person who utters the sentence is using the name Cerberus, rather, he is talking about the use of the name, expressing that it does not name an existing dog.

The B expression uses what Frege calls a 'Begriffswort' (dragon). It is not about dragons, which then are said not to exist, rather, it attributes dragonhood to something or other (in this case to nothing). Since we are dealing with a predicate and not with a proper name, we are not forced, after we have said 'there are no dragons' to admit that there after all must be one, at least.

But the C proposition contains a predicate 'is' or 'exists' that is genuinely meaningful. Namely, the sense in which one says that an individual came to exist, still exists, no longer exists etc. 'The sense of "to be" in which God says of himself "I am who *am*", or in which Homer spoke of the Gods who ever are, *aiei eontes*' (58).

If a C proposition 'x is not' is true, we cannot argue the subject-term x has no longer anything to refer to, and hence no predication is made. That would be confusing the reference of the name with the bearer of the name.

It is this sense of being that is meant by *esse*, or *actus essendi* - being real as such. It is this sense of being that Whitehead is discussing.<sup>194</sup> We have cleared it from the charge of being meaningless. But we are left with the question: What is the meaning of the phrase that combines 'quo' and 'est', in the sense we have established, into 'quo aliquid est' - that by which a thing is? And that is precisely the question what it could mean to speak of the nature of actual existence. The metaphysically essentialist reading of Whitehead takes, one might say, the 'id' (for 'quo' means an 'id quo', a 'that by which') too seriously: as if there has to be something or other that makes things be (namely, acts of becoming conceived as underlying really reals, essences or conditions of possibility).

*Quodlibet esse est secundam formam aliquam* - existence in sense C is always existence in respect of some form. In other words, existence is of the nature of the function.

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<sup>194</sup> *Nota bene*: this is not to say that Whitehead *accepts* the account of *actus essendi*, and has his own modifications staying within its parameters. Whitehead develops an alternative account as an answer to the same question, namely the question of the meaning of being.



And indeed, Aquinas seems to say that being is only conceptually distinct, an inseparable aspect of the individualized form ('albedo Socratis' etc.). *Esse* of itself goes with a form, for form is actuality: *Esse autem per se convenit formae, quae est actus*. And: for any given thing, that by which it exists, is its form (60).

Being is the form of forms. It is not in itself another 'that by which', over and above all the individualized forms making up a suppositum. But it is that by which these individualized forms are real. This means, and this is important, that the mode of analysis given with suppositum and form, a mode of analysis derived from the subject-predicate form of proposition, is used, generalized, as Whitehead would say (PR 6), to cover an area in which it is originally alien, namely the being as such of things. What has been done is this: The way existing things are analysed (insofar as they are this or that), has been used as an analysis of existence itself. *Esse* has become an ill-seated fellow-traveller of form - it is only a matter of time before it drops out.

The point is not that the possibility is lost of having a real distinction between individualized form and being. That possibility is maintained, and it is even important for a number of reasons (61-64). The point is, that the only way to speak about being is in terms of a super-form, a form of forms.

Equipped with all this, if we go to Whitehead what do we find? First we note how Whitehead insists on the non-conceptuality of actual existence: a fact is more than its forms.

The individualized form ('albedo Socratis'), which is signified by a subject-predicate structure, cannot be the analysis of concrete fact, fact meaning 'ens'. It is a mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. And yet, that is what the phrase *quo aliquid est* professes to do, by treating *est* as a predicate expressive of the form of forms, or, in other words, by using the *quo*-analysis as an analysis of *esse*. *Esse*, in Whitehead *creativity*, is conditioned by its creatures - it cannot be found anywhere else than in actual entities, and these are dependent for their definiteness upon forms, but each fact is more than its forms. This 'more', which has nothing to do with definiteness, is inexplicable by forms, or

any mode of analysis based on forms.<sup>195</sup> It is concreteness, or individual existence as such, and that can never be reached by individualizing forms, no matter how much of an *inimicus Plato* you try to be. It is for Whitehead expressed by words like inherence, prehension, participation; words which, strictly speaking, drop out of the SP-structure of statement. They are not 'about' concreteness, they 'exhibit' it. Because there is no underlying reality, the modes of realization can take on forms, but that does not mean there is a need to posit a baffling relation of possession or qualification between forms and substances or acts, and this can, and should, be taken as meant to do away with platonic participation.

If this critique is intended as a critique of the philosophy of subsistent ideas, it is well-deserved, but, as we have already noticed, the alternative is open to the same charge of explicating being in terms of form (albeit form-of-a-being). And, even so, this word 'of', followed by a genitive noun, is it so clear? First, we have denied any relation between form and fact, and have tried to illustrate this by saying that there is also no exotic relation between, say, 5 and 25 on account of the fact that 5 is the square root of 25. 'Square root of ...' is like 'wisdom of ...', and 'square root of 25' (5), is like 'wisdom of Socrates'. There is no inherence, or participation relation between 25 and 'square root of 25', and neither is there any between Socrates and 'wisdom of Socrates'. That is, talking of inherence is here supposed to be part of an explanation, of an explanation of how concrete fact comes to be out of universals and supposits. This is already in contradiction with the basic thought that universals are of derivative actuality ('entis', rather than 'ens'). There is nothing to explain.

But now we must remember that being was said to be always in respect of some form. So for Socrates to be, means to be some way or other - wise, as the case may be. So Socrates' being is being wise. But being wise is a property (referred to by a predicate) which admits of manyness, albeit analogically related. So, to use the phrase of Whitehead quoted above, concrete fact ('Socrates') exhibits entities abstract from itself (wisdom, etc.) and yet participated in by its own nature. Just as there can be no doubt about the meaningfulness of the predicate 'to be' in our 'C propositions', so, too, can there be no doubt about the meaningfulness of the predicate 'participate'

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<sup>195</sup> In one sense of the term, this means that there can be no 'analysis' of it - it is not an explanandum.

in this sentence here. For it is just that - taking part of a (possible) manifoldness. Only, we have not 'analysed' the ontological constitution of our wise Socrates into more basic factors, by saying this. We have exhibited (part of) what it means for Socrates to be wise. Whitehead now can be said to make the move of dropping Socrates as something else than the actuality of his forms of being. He drops matter (in the Aristotelian sense) and replaces it with the individualizing and unifying activity of becoming: acts become, and with that forms of act become. The becoming is the unification of a manifold of antecedents in the determinate togetherness of a single perspective<sup>196</sup> upon the whole manifold. But this single perspective is a situation *within* the whole, and a situation *of* the whole. Also there is no *id quo* of the act. Therefore Whitehead has not offered us a kind of pseudo-explanation, by speaking about inherence, and yet he has said something meaningful. What is more, we have shown that the classical treatment of *actus essendi*, on the model of the subject-predicate form of proposition, makes trouble for itself by its more or less explicit identification of form and actuality. For only that leads inevitably to the conclusion that the '*ergänzungsbedürftige*' function is all we need for the analysis of *esse*. The ultimate driving force behind this is the logicism of metaphysics, the modelling of metaphysical analysis on the logical form of the proposition. Whitehead, on the contrary, I have indicated, tries to use a different understanding of terms like participation etc. The analysis of actuality is for Whitehead not a logical project; the logical structure of the proposition, both the subject-predicate form as well as the propositional-function form - indeed, Geach has shown that they do not differ all that much - have their place, but they are not essential to metaphysics. The obscurity of notions like inherence, exhibition and participation as characterizations of the relation between an individual thing and its forms vanishes once the individuals are no longer thought of as static being, but instead as dynamic becoming. When Whitehead uses the phrase 'eternal object' he is not referring to an actuality, but to a possibility for actualization. It is eternal and objective simply because it is not exhausted by finite manifestations (no act can be again, but a form

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<sup>196</sup> We should not now reinstall the duality between form and entity by taking this word 'perspective' as a 'perspective on something'. An interpretation of the word 'perspective' from the occasions point of view would stress the prefix 'per' and read it as the 'ranging throughout' the manifold of antecedents. But we will not attempt this interpretation here.

can) and because it is a given for realization. Potentiality and objectivity are very closely related, as can be seen in the case of the antecedent, objectified occasions which are the real potentials for a new becoming.

There is one parallel to be drawn, and that is that 'creativity' is a general notion, in other words an eternal object, meant to characterize concrete actualization, which is not characterizable by forms. A leap of the imagination remains, in Whitehead too, the essential supplement to metaphysical propositions.

### *3.5 Ramifications of the Occasions-Analysis*

In Whitehead's metaphysics, substances are replaced by occasions (processes) and occasions aren't the actualized essences traditional metaphysics works with. The occasions-analysis is an alternative to the traditional metaphysical constellation. The most succinct form in which this alternative is expressed, is the ontological principle: apart from occasions of experience there is nothing. We will further discuss the occasions-analysis in reference to three topics: the occasion as an act of experience in relation to the criticism that the metaphysics of experience is a form of panpsychism; the occasion as connected in process to other occasions; the distinction between appearance and reality as fundamental for substance metaphysics and not fundamental for Whitehead's metaphysics.

These three topics clarify the ramifications of the idea that the act of experience is the sole actuality.

#### *3.5.1 Experience and Panpsychism*

The rise of Naturalism [in art] in the later Middle Ages was the entry into the European mind of the final ingredient necessary for the rise of science. It was the rise of interest in natural objects and in natural occurrences, for their own sakes. The natural foliage of a district was sculptured in out-of-the-way spots of the later buildings, merely as exhibiting delight in those familiar objects. The whole atmosphere of every art exhibited a direct joy in the apprehension of the things which lie around us. The craftsmen who executed the late medieval decorative sculpture, Giotto, Chaucer, Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, and, at the present day, the New England poet Robert Frost, are all akin to each other in this respect. The

simple immediate facts are the topics of interest, and these reappear in the thought of science as the 'irreducible stubborn facts'. (SMW 15)

It is not difficult to complete this description of the 'ultimate dab of the clothes-brush' in the framing of scientific mentality, the final intellectual 'There!', to use a phrase of F. Scott Fitzgerald's<sup>197</sup>, with a reference to the interest in the immediate stubborn facts of human psychology and ordinary human life, with its individual self-consciousness, its social dimension, its subconscious determinations, its delights, aspirations, projects, enjoyments and sufferings, characteristic of modern culture. Physics, psychology and the novel are hand in glove.

Mostly, speculative thought is seen as the enemy to this wholesome naturalism. It puts men with one leg in this world, and with the other in a world beyond, which is thought to be of more importance, but yet remains unseen, deeply mysterious and vague. It leads us to ignore the here and now, the full concreteness of individual existence and the responsibilities we have to each other, rather than to the seers' rendition of Truth, Reality and Morality.<sup>198</sup> Metaphysics means cruelty and dogmatism, and dogmatism is the most threatening force working against scientific enlightened rationality.<sup>199</sup> The critique of metaphysics has in accordance with this

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<sup>197</sup> Fitzgerald 1922, p. 9.

<sup>198</sup> Rorty gives the following pointed expression of this feeling: '[M]y preferred narrative is a story of human beings as having recently gotten out from under the thought of, and the need for, *authority*. I see James's suggestion that we carry utilitarianism over from morals into epistemology as crucial to this anti-authoritarian movement of the spirit. For James shows us how to see Truth not as something we have to respect, but as a pointless nominalization of the useful adjective we apply to beliefs that are getting us what we want. Ceasing to see Truth as the name of an authority and coming to see the search for stable and useful beliefs as simply one more part of the pursuit of happiness are essential if we are to have the experimental attitude toward social existence that Dewey commended and the experimental attitude toward individual existence that Romanticism commended.' In: Saatkamp 1995, p. 71.

<sup>199</sup> From the standpoint of this quick and sketchy definition of our science-dominated culture, it follows that there is no sharp break between Enlightenment and Romanticism. Both share the same presupposition (the recourse to the 'stubborn facts'), but differ in emphasis. They complement each other. Whitehead is acutely aware of the danger of bringing in metaphysics too soon, and also of the need to do justice to both the 'enlightenment' as well as the 'romanticist' mindset, so to speak. Cp. the following quotation from *The Concept of Nature*, where it is contemporary scientific philosophy that is prematurely 'metaphysical':

The recourse to metaphysics is like throwing a match into the powder magazine. It blows up the whole arena. This is exactly what scientific philosophers do when they are driven into a corner and convicted of incoherence. They at once drag in the mind and talk of entities in the mind or out of the mind as the case may be. For natural philosophy

opinion largely taken the approach of dismantling the notions of Truth, Reality and Morals by either putting metaphysics to the test of scientific verifiability, as in Hume and subsequent empiricism, or deconstructing it by an interpretation of the hidden psychological motives of metaphysicians, as for example in Voltaire or Nietzsche. We may put a general label on these approaches by saying, in reference to Kant, that metaphysics has come to fall under anthropology (in Kant's own case under transcendental anthropology, in the case of Nietzsche and Voltaire, perhaps, under empirical anthropology), rather than the other way around:

Das Feld der Philosophie . . . läßt sich auf folgende Fragen bringen:

- 1) Was kann ich wissen?
- 2) Was soll ich tun?
- 3) Was darf ich hoffen?
- 4) Was ist der Mensch?

Die erste Frage beantwortet die *Metaphysik*, die zweite die *Moral*, die dritte die *Religion*, und die vierte die *Anthropologie*. Im Grunde könnte man aber alles dieses zur Anthropologie rechnen, weil sich die drei ersten Fragen auf die letzte beziehen.<sup>200</sup>

Of course this is far from putting philosophy, as accommodator of specialist knowledge and mediator between old and new theories and ideas, or even in its more or less traditional configuration as rational reflection on ultimate notions, out of a job, as indeed history has shown. Yet Whitehead does not agree. For the 'naturalism' discussed above is only possible if there is a belief in an order of nature, which itself cannot be justified by an inductive generalization (this, of course, was

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everything perceived is in nature. We may not pick and choose. For us the red glow of the sunset should be as much part of nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain the phenomenon. It is for natural philosophy to analyse how these various elements of nature are connected. (29)

In this connection we may refer to Hampe (Hampe and Maaßen 1991a, pp. 25-27) who points out that it is one of the strong points of Whitehead's philosophy that he does not force upon us a choice between a naturalism that alienates man from himself insofar as it sees man as part of nature, conceived as harbouring no room for subjective experience, and a metaphysics of subjectivity which alienates man from nature at large and from his own natural side. But we must also realize that his is a speculative naturalism, and that you can't have the happy results Hampe mentions without taking seriously the speculative status of Whitehead's concepts.

<sup>200</sup> Kant 1800, p. 447f.

Hume's point). It springs 'from direct inspection of the nature of things as disclosed in our own immediate present experience' (SMW 18).<sup>201</sup> Thus there is no way to go behind experience to find anything more real - anything productive of it. Experience is the field, so to speak, in which reality is disclosed to us, and the thought of something real *outside* experience is an instance of misplaced concreteness. Being empirical amounts to this: seeing that we are actually existing, and seeing that our actual existence consists in 'experiencing', i.e. finding ourselves in a common world, extended temporally and spatially, amid others, we can try to analyse the deliverance of our own immediate experience with respect to the general nature of actual existence by framing the hypothesis that what presents itself as completely general as far as we are concerned - namely 'experience'<sup>202</sup>, contains in fact the characteristics that apply to all actual existence. For when we examine what our own generic activity of becoming is, we find that it is 'experiencing'. The notion of an 'object', an other activity of becoming, devoid of 'experience' in this general sense is a construct, not warranted by immediate disclosure. Thus we repudiate the notion of actual existence devoid of its own subjective immediacy (vacuous actuality). The general character of the more complex forms of actual existence then have to pertain to the less complex forms as well. This hypothesis can be traced in its ramifications, but a first thing to note is that it is a great preservative of the coherence of our theory about the general nature of actuality, because it would be quite incomprehensible how experient actualities could emerge out of something which is totally devoid of experience. This notion of experience isn't just metaphorical because it is not used to characterize something which is properly speaking *not* experience. Rather, we try to

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<sup>201</sup> For in our own immediate present experience (which comprises *both* our immediate awareness of ourselves in the act of experience and the 'empirical world' as disclosed in it!) we find 'that there is no parting from your own shadow, ... that in being ourselves we are more than ourselves, ... that our experience, dim and fragmentary as it is, yet sounds the utmost depths of reality, ... that detached details merely in order to be themselves demand that they should find themselves in a system of things' (SMW 18). Thus the connectedness of things is as much a factor of immediate experience as the 'empirical world of daily life'.

<sup>202</sup> Explained quite clearly as follows by Leclerc:

Whitehead agrees with Descartes that ... what is to be explicitly taken as an instance of an actual entity is oneself. Secondly, he is at one with Descartes in holding that the factor of 'experiencing' is of primary significance in this context; that is to say, we ourselves must be regarded as essentially 'experiencing entities'. (Leclerc 1958, p. 125)

get at the general principle, exemplified in us as what we call 'experience'. This attempt can be called 'imaginative'. Experience in the generalized sense can be seen to lie at the basis both of causation and perception. The latter two are particular exemplifications of it. Whitehead quotes a passage from the *Silva Silvarum* of Francis Bacon as illustration:

It is certain that all bodies whatsoever, though they have no sense, yet they have perception; for when one body is applied to another, there is a kind of election to embrace that which is agreeable, and to exclude or expel that which is ingrate; and whether the body be alterant or altered, evermore a perception precedeth operation; for else all bodies would be like one to another. And sometimes this perception, in some kinds of bodies, is far more subtile than sense; so that sense is but a dull thing in comparison of it: we see a weatherglass will find the least difference of the weather in heat or cold, when we find it not.<sup>203</sup>

Bacon distinguishes carefully between sense and causation on the one hand and 'perception', the general underlying principle of 'taking account of', on the other. 'Perception' as used by Bacon is not a metaphor, nor a contentless formal account of relationality. But it *is* diametrically opposed to the kind of scientific materialism in which matter is thought of as the passive object of external forces. Therefore we find it hard to understand that another approach is possible, and maybe even the more rational one. But we may begin to understand it once we see that the alternative is as much a hypothesis of speculative metaphysics as the other. It is not an inductive generalization, nor an analysis of timeless concepts because it too can claim no status for itself save that of a general characterization of what presents itself *in* and *as* concrete immediate experience, for that is all we can say there is (PR 4). Then the incoherence of materialism would be seen to be a big problem.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Quoted SMW 41.

<sup>204</sup> After all, the scientific materialist has to acknowledge the reality of our experience and fit it into his scheme. In this context it is very interesting to see Oxford philosopher Galen Strawson move into a direction which comes very close to Whitehead. He defends a position (Strawson 1994) called 'materialism', which is a form of neutral monism, which he explains as follows (I quote at length because of the remarkable affinities):

So what is it, today, to be a genuine and realistic materialist? Well, materialism is the view that every thing and event in the universe is physical - that 'physical phenomenon' is coextensive with 'real phenomenon'. Since no one remotely realistic can deny the reality of experiential phenomena, materialism certainly involves the view that experiential phenomena - experiential phenomena considered specifically as such, specifically as consciousness phenomena with a certain qualitative-experiential character - are wholly



But is this use of the concept of experience (by Whitehead) or perception (by Bacon) not simply a form of panpsychism? Panpsychism is the view that everything that can be said to really exist is of the nature of the human psyche - our conscious experience. In reference to the argument against vacuous actuality and the subsequent elaboration of the account of actual existence in terms of acts of experience (PR 18), Whitehead's philosophy has been criticized (and praised by some) for being 'panpsychist' or 'vitalist'.<sup>205</sup> In principle nothing can be said against these epithets but we have to be careful about how we take them. For 'life' and 'psyche' no longer have their ordinary meanings as that which is opposed to dead matter and that which forms inner representations of outer existents. The speculative use of the notion of 'experience' hinges on the generalization of it to the point where it signifies the inherence of a transcendent other in the act of experience (we have seen how Whitehead describes it as 'concern' and gives a formal account in terms of 'prehension') and the subsequent return to conscious human experience for an elucidation, informed by this generalized understanding, of human experience.

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physical: strictly on a par with the phenomena of extension and electricity as characterized by physics. It follows from this alone . . . that current physics, considered as an account of the general nature of the physical, is hopelessly incomplete. No one who doubts this can be a true materialist. Partly for this reason, I think that genuine, reflective endorsement of materialism is a considerable achievement for anyone who has had a standard modern Western education. If one hasn't felt a kind of vertigo of astonishment, when facing the thought, obligatory for all realistic materialists, that consciousness is a wholly physical phenomenon in every respect, including every qualitative-experiential respect - a sense of having been precipitated into a completely new confrontation with the utter strangeness of the physical relative to all common-sense and scientific conceptions of it . . . - then one hasn't got to the start line. (Strawson 1998, p. 464)

The similarities are striking, but there is as little point in calling this 'materialism' as there is in calling Whitehead's philosophy 'panpsychism' - these words only indicate the absence of a reason to postulate a fundamental dualism in reality between (conscious) experience and the physical and as such.

<sup>205</sup> Most notably Hartshorne keeps using the term 'panpsychism' (or his alternative 'psychicalism') for his, and Whitehead's philosophy, and moreover in a very literal fashion. Cp. for example Hartshorne 1995. Lowe reports that Whitehead didn't like the word panpsychism for his philosophy (Lowe 1963, p. 126). We can only conjecture as to the reasons for this, but from our interpretation of the status of speculative concepts it seems likely that it has something to do with the fact that the word 'panpsychism' suggests the form of metaphysics we have characterized as 'essentialist', maybe even in the reductionist variety.

Explaining the general term with the reference to the notion of the 'psyche' in any one of its traditional meanings is the world upside-down.

Kant criticized panpsychism (which he called *Hylozoismus*) for two reasons: first, it contains an inner contradiction because it assigns agency to what is lifeless; second, it gives no foundation for the generalization of intentional teleology in nature from some to all natural creatures and processes.<sup>206</sup> The first criticism is also for Kant reason to reject the position which holds that only some among natural creatures are characterized by intentional teleology, on account of their complexity of organization, resulting in a radical distinction between the realm of necessity and the realm of ends.

In view of the speculative use Whitehead makes of the concept of experience, we can answer Kant in the following way: the contradiction in the very idea of panpsychism, which seems to apply equally to the concept of an occasion, is simply removed by the realization that matter as that which is devoid of agency is a meaningless concept for Whitehead.<sup>207</sup> It is an abstraction and only as such conceivable. The second criticism, the generalization of intentional teleology<sup>208</sup>, is met, equally simple, by the fact that the concept of an occasion, though it is an instance of self-realization and is therefore teleological, by no means implies intentionality as we know it in ourselves. The striving or appetite inherent in actuality is a 'principle of unrest, involving realization of what is not and may be' (PR 32). It is process, the passage of nature in general, a speculative notion arrived at by generalization from our subjective experience, but not tied to its specific form. We will look closer at the place of process in the occasions-analysis.

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<sup>206</sup> *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (2nd edition, 1793), §72.

<sup>207</sup> Also Russell 1927, p. 78: 'Matter has become as ghostly as anything in a spiritual séance.'

<sup>208</sup> Where for Kant the problem is with the intentional, rather than with the teleological - cp. Wiehl 1996, p. 344f.

### 3.5.2 Process and Occasions

Actual existence, then, is the existence of occasions and occasions are the natural unities that make up our experience. It is an empirical matter<sup>209</sup> which elements in experience are natural unities, and which are artificial or 'abstract'. As far as metaphysics is concerned, all we have to say is that there are natural unities and that these unities are self-realizing acts of experience. The occasions-structure brings with it an essential connectedness in the nature of actual entities. For the occasion is nothing over and above its connectivity with others. Its place in the process of origination of new actual entities, and the origination of new actual entities, designated by the ultimate notion of *creativity*, is nothing over and above the realization of the entity's situation or location in process. The actual entity is the location of the togetherness of others, and this location is an act of becoming. The exclusion of vacuous actuality excludes the notion of a mere static togetherness of many entities which is not itself another entity.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> But note that the 'empirical' is not the 'uninterpreted'. There is no uninterpreted experience (PR 14-15).

<sup>210</sup> Creativity isn't anything except the most general characteristic of actual existence. It is not a force working behind the scenes. The occasions actualize themselves (PR 222). According to PR 21 creativity replaces Aristotle's category of 'primary substance' and 'characterizes ultimate matter of fact'. This has been taken to imply that Whitehead wavers between assigning full actuality to the occasion or to creativity. (See Garland 1983 for discussion and further references.) But from the point of view of what we have said about speculative categories, it must simply be the case that creativity is a *category*. The sentence at PR 21 reads: 'This Category of the Ultimate replaces Aristotle's category of "primary substance".' 'Substance', like 'creativity', is a category, not a kind. Unlike Aristotle's notion of substance, which can easily be developed, and has been thus developed, into a monism, creativity is essentially pluralist. There are many occasions. Cp. PR 7, in reference to Spinoza: 'Spinoza's "modes" . . . become [in Whitehead's philosophy] the sheer actualities.' In *Science and the Modern World* we do not find the notion of creativity, but we do find a 'substantial activity', 'expressing itself in individual embodiments' (SMW 107; my emphasis). We could think that the ultimacy of the finite occasion as the sole actuality wasn't perfectly clear in Whitehead's mind when he wrote SMW, but neither seems there enough ground to posit an actual substantial activity over and above the occasions here (*pace* Vanderveken and Cloots (1993)). Cp. also SMW 123, 'the underlying substantial activity of individualisation' and SMW 165, '[t]he analysed elements of the situation are the attributes of the substantial activity'; here 'analysed elements' does not refer to occasions, but to the metaphysical structure of the individualizing substantial activity. The 'situation' is the occasion. If the case of SMW remains somewhat undecided, Whitehead may have changed his views later on. In PR there can be no question about the status of creativity as actual only in its instances and meaningless apart from occasions (PR 225).

An occasion is the prehension, the taking up into its own unity, of other antecedently realized occasions. The temporal structure<sup>211</sup> whereby prehension is always of antecedents by successors is essential. To explain: prehension requires determinateness of the prehended entity. Determinateness is the result of the act of becoming; now because the act of becoming defines *present actuality*, we can say that a fully determinate occasion (which, because of its determinateness is no longer becoming, is no longer in 'concrecence'), a completed occasion (Whitehead speaks of an occasion as having reached its satisfaction), is always *past*. It has lost the subjective immediacy by which an occasion is an act of becoming. But pastness is not an absolute quality. For the completed occasion is no longer, except as qualifying the present, meaning that its pastness cannot be defined in relation to it. Only what is prehended by an act of becoming as a completed occasion is thereby 'past'.<sup>212</sup> Thus there is a real inherence of the past in the present.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> 'Temporal' must here be understood in the basic sense of a 'passage'. Cp. fn. 24.

<sup>212</sup> PR 350. Should there be a non-temporal actuality, it should be at one with all temporal occasions, and for it nothing would ever be past, in the sense of having lost its subjective immediacy. This non-temporal actuality would be a redefinition of 'God'. Then we could say that as '[a]n enduring personality in the temporal world is a route of occasions in which the successors with some peculiar completeness sum up their predecessors', so 'in God's nature [there] is an even more complete unity of life in a chain of elements for which succession does not mean loss of immediate unison' (*ib.*).

Although Whitehead develops a sketch for a theology, the concept of God is not immediately essential to his ontology, in the sense that the concept of an occasion could not be developed without a reference to God (although, naturally, adding the notion of the divine to one's philosophy has its influence throughout the system). The so-called 'conceptual valuation' of potentiality (PR 31), which, in the elaboration of the system, is a conceptual necessity, hardly deserves the name 'God' in and of itself (Emmet 1945, p. 186). Consequently, and in line with the determination of the nature of speculative philosophy, all Whitehead tries in his theological writings is to interpret religious experience in terms of the speculative scheme. See Rescher 1996, pp. 153-164, and Sherburne 1971. Also PR 343:

[W]e must investigate dispassionately what the metaphysical principles, here developed, require . . . as to the nature of God. There is nothing here in the nature of proof. There is merely the confrontation of the theoretic system with a certain rendering of the facts. But the unsystematized report upon the facts is itself highly controversial, and the system is confessedly inadequate. The deductions from it in this particular sphere of thought cannot be looked upon as more than suggestions as to how the problem is transformed in the light of that system.

As far as metaphysics proper is concerned, the question whether Whitehead's metaphysics is a form of onto-theology, because of the inclusion in it of a conception of God, seems the most pressing concern. It can quickly be dispatched of by noting that God is not the same as Creativity, that He is

The act of becoming, the living present, is essentially fleeting, and at the same time essentially a process of unification. Every experience is a new reality, organizing itself in relation to what is given to it. Here I use 'to' rather than 'for', because the connectivity of the occasion - the fact that it in a way *is* its antecedents, entering into its own nature - implies directedness.<sup>214</sup>

The act of becoming is an act of unification. Unification has an end, namely unity. When that end is reached, the becoming ceases. Therewith experient immediacy ceases - for that is what becoming is.<sup>215</sup> Why then would there be a next occasion? We can see how there have to be previous occasions for unification to be able to begin - if there is nothing to unify, there can be no unification. But why should there be a next? I think this question is the same as the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' Whitehead makes it clear that the transition from one occasion to the next (or from a manifold of settled occasions to next occasions<sup>216</sup>), the fact that there is a next, is inexplicable by an analysis of the components of the process (PR

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not the *summum ens* (PR 348), and that He is not the ground of existence for the occasions - they are self-realizing.

<sup>213</sup> There is also a real inherence of the future in the present. Without the future, the present collapses because it is emptied of its proper content (AI 191). Whitehead points out that apart from the insertion of the future in 'the crannies of the present' (*ib.*) the most familiar habits of mankind lose their meaning. He mentions legal contracts, social understandings of any kind, ambitions, anxieties, and railway time-tables. Part of the constitution of the present act of becoming is that a future will supersede it, although that future, unlike the past, is not yet a determinate grouping of occasions. Whitehead speaks of a principle of unrest, involving realization of what is not but may be (PR 32). 'Realizing what is not but may be' requires a reference to the future which cannot be a mere representation because the future is not there for representation. There has to be *real inherence*, however preliminary, of the future in the occasion. Thus the occasion is essentially tensed but Whitehead says that this temporality is not to be identified with physical time. Physical time is the result of the process of occasions, and it exemplifies an aspect of it; it is not the container in which the process of occasions unfolds itself (PR IV, I).

<sup>214</sup> Cp. PR III, II, I for the detailed account of the way in which the act of becoming starts by repeating its antecedents (in a redefined notion of repetition, which excludes mere representation).

<sup>215</sup> See previous section.

<sup>216</sup> The related question why there are many strands of connectivity rather than just a single series can be answered by saying this is a contingent empirical feature of the real - it needn't have been so - referent in last instance to the moment of contingency or free decision within concrescence. In AI 179, Whitehead identifies the first phase of a new concrescence with the activity inherent in the actual world which is its datum, its possibility. He speaks of a 'real' or active potentiality in the actual world, which is just the first phase of the next occasion. The actualization of potentiality is what we mean by creativity. Also PR 220-221.

21f.). 'Creativity' as the principle of nextness (or 'novelty') is not further characterizable, and (being the final ground of things, because it is the ultimate generalization pertaining to occasions which in last instance refers all occasions to themselves as their reason) is itself groundless. The account of the inherence of the future (fn. 213), then, is backed up only by the requirement of doing justice to what we find in our own experience.

Speculative philosophy is generally assumed to be necessarily involved in seeking grounds or foundations, pointing away from the things themselves in order to say, with universal applicability, what their being consists in. This is another aspect of metaphysics in its essentialist variety. In this context we may think of the philosophical position of the Creator God in many classical philosophies, or of Kant's transcendental subjectivity. We may also refer to Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason, in its one-sided interpretation as affording an expression of the meaning of 'to be'. It has been held by Heidegger to be the definitive statement of what had secretly determined the course of philosophy ever since its beginning.<sup>217</sup> In Whitehead's philosophy we find a wholly immanent concept of ground, for the occasion is its own reason, and it is so always in a situated, historicized manner. But this does not violate the rationality of philosophy, for rationality (the coherence of general ideas) is an aspect of the process of occasions, growing with it and having its place within in. The fact that ideality is always situated in concrete occasions is not a violation of its universality, although it does mean that the universal applicability of ideas arrived at by imaginative generalization can never have an a priori guarantee, and may grow or wane in time. New occasions of existence, with their unpredictable concrete uniqueness, which can only be understood in its own terms, always break in upon the scene and infuse rationality with the vivid sense of historical situation, like a gush of fresh air.<sup>218</sup> Universality in a world of occasions is universal relatedness, not just of occasions but also of the forms inherent in occasions. Thus there is an immanent expressive relation between eternal objects, but only *via* their

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<sup>217</sup> Cp. Heidegger 1957, p. 15f.

<sup>218</sup> And they can pose - temporarily, at least - insurmountable difficulties for communicative understanding.

manifestations in occasions. We survey the world, and do so always from a particular, situated position.

### 3.5.3 *Appearance and Reality*

The third and last aspect of occasions-analysis we will discuss is what happens to the distinction between appearance and reality. For traditional metaphysics, this distinction is fundamental; for Whitehead's metaphysics it is of limited interest although its central place in conscious perception explains the - unjustified - centrality it gained in the history of thought. Like the notion of substance, the ultimacy of this distinction is for Whitehead a deep-seated mistake in metaphysical thought, accounting for a lot of its blind alleys.

The centrality of the interpretation of *being* itself in terms of what can be truly, really said to be *a* being (in short, a subsistent form, a substance which does not enter into others, that which can be thought without reference to something else or that which is permanent) almost automatically leads to installing a bifurcation within being, in one of its familiar guises. Either the distinction appearance - reality assumes ultimate importance: what exists in the full sense is transcendent, there is a transcendental level of conditions of possibility of the empirical, or nature and mind are construed as external to each other. For Whitehead, all these moves issue from the basic motive of substance metaphysics, namely the interpretation of actual existence as the actual existence of permanent things. In the set of as yet unpublished lecture notes taken by Whitehead's student Dorothy Emmet we had occasion to refer to before<sup>219</sup>, he indicates this in reference to Kant:

[The] history of modern philosophy [is] an attempt to express a thoroughgoing organic view in language which includes phraseology which can only be interpreted in terms of the non-organic, contact view. Kant thought experience was an organic attainment of its own unity, but he also had the ultimate notion of substance and quality, so he has to have the element of mere appearance over against the real.

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<sup>219</sup> See 1.6.

Start from 'participation'. For a thoroughgoing view or organism you must extend it to the notion of actualities participating in each other (not only actualities participating in the forms). Then all the difficulties about causation and perception will be how the rest of the world enters into one's conscious being. ('Prehension' means participation in this enlarged sense.)<sup>220</sup>

For Whitehead the distinction between *appearance* and *reality* is not fundamental. It comes in only in the higher phases of experience and pertains mostly to those factors in experience which can be discriminated in consciousness with particular clarity and focus, such as sensible objects or abstract entities. It has its place in the sequential structure of occasions and refers to the capacity of complex occasions to select certain elements of their actual world (their *reality*) for further integration in the concrescent act of experience (the resultant *appearance*), while excluding others.<sup>221</sup> But the all-pervading presence of it in consciousness has led philosophers since the Greeks to take this distinction as the most fundamental, the starting point for metaphysical analysis.<sup>222</sup> It seems to follow that all forms of metaphysical analysis which, somehow or other, involve a two-world interpretation of reality (either in the form of a transcendent, a transcendental or a rigidly dualistic philosophy) are so many results of this basic presupposition.<sup>223</sup>

The opposition to this started with empiricism. In the empiricist tradition the presupposition was questioned, or better, driven to absurdity, by Hume.<sup>224</sup> Hume simply dismissed the notion of substance.<sup>225</sup> Kant then reinstalled it and with that

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<sup>220</sup> The quotation is dated April 30, 1929. Cp. also PR 72.

<sup>221</sup> See AI 209-219 for the full account. It is important to point out that appearance comes about in an essential reference to forms (eternal objects) and can thus be said to constitute the 'mental' aspect of the occasion. The determinateness of form explains why appearance stands out with particular clarity amid the whole field of prehended entities. Whitehead suggests that its conspicuous nature explains why it has assumed the false status of an ultimate, hierarchical opposition in metaphysics.

<sup>222</sup> AI 209f., 212.

<sup>223</sup> In a way, we could say, the distinction does assume a fundamental role even in Whitehead. For consider: what he says is that the distinction appears to be fundamental, from the standpoint of conscious human experience, but in reality isn't, and he identifies this as the decisive circumstance which led to the major errors in metaphysics. But this objection can readily be met by pointing out that this is of course quite natural since philosophy itself is part of human conscious experience, and therefore subject to the distinction, which for it has the same pervasive status as for other parts of human conscious experience. All criticism moves back and forth between appearance and reality.

<sup>224</sup> And after Hume it is self-consciously denied in the radical empiricism of James, whom Whitehead accordingly likens to Descartes as inaugurating a new stage in philosophy (SMW 143).

<sup>225</sup> Hume 1739, I, I, vi.



reinstalled the two-world motive (although, of course, it isn't absent in Hume either because in final instance he resorts to an unmediated polarity between philosophy and common experience). Many twentieth-century philosophers have returned to the Humean sceptical starting point, and accordingly dismissed metaphysics. We can position Whitehead in this respect by remarking that he, too, starts from the Humean sceptical conclusion, but does not accept it. Rather, he challenges the basic presupposition, i.e. the fundamental notion of substance with the modern concept of matter which arises from it:

[The] status of 'appearance' in the constitution of experience is the reason for the disastrous metaphysical doctrine of physical matter passively illustrating qualities, and devoid of self-enjoyment. As soon as clarity and distinctness are made the test of metaphysical importance, an entire misapprehension of the metaphysical status of appearance is involved. (AI 212)

Hume dismisses the concept of substance as meaningless, but doesn't follow his own argument through. He should also have dismissed his conception of experiences as not connected to others and analyzable in terms of the subjective entertainment of universals; had he done that he would have been led to Whitehead's central claims.<sup>226</sup> In other words, what is required is an account of how actualities can *participate* in each other, instead of only (externally) making *contact* with each other. We can then do justice to the fact that experience is not merely of universals, but of particulars as well (which exhibit universal characteristics as their forms of definiteness, to be sure). Moreover, in contrast to Hume, a speculative account of the being 'in' each other of actual entities (in Whitehead's philosophy incorporated in the notion of prehension) allows us to unify the speculative treatment of causality and perception, which is the only way to save both of them as forms of real interconnection.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> PR 140.

<sup>227</sup> PR 58: '[T]he problem of perception and the problem of power are one and the same'. Both power and perception are forms of the participation of actual entities in each other. The theory of the extensive continuum and the theory of feeling in PR provide the detailed explanation of power and perception. As noted in the introduction, we will not go into these aspects of Whitehead's philosophy. An adequate treatment of them would in itself constitute a separate study.

What then does it mean to be? For Whitehead, we have seen in chapter 1, there is nothing apart from occasions. So, to be means to be an occasion or at least to be involved in an occasion. We have also already seen (3.2) that we can distinguish between being in the most general sense, in which it pertains to anything whatsoever and being in the sense of that which exists fully or finally, meaning that which has agency. In other words, we cannot say 'to be means to be an occasion' but we can say 'to be in the full sense of the word means to be an occasion'. This is not a reduction of the manifold of categoreal structure to a single preeminent category which is 'real' over against the more or less merely 'apparent' character of the others. It is an explication of what the unity of the categories consists in. For Whitehead 'unity' is always 'a unity' and a unity is an occasion. Once we have the notion of 'occasion' in the sense explained, we can develop an entire metaphysics of occasions, a 'critique of pure feeling'.<sup>228</sup> In the further elaboration of the theory of feeling, the theory of extension and the final interpretation (ethics, aesthetics, theory of civilization) Whitehead has made a start with that project. But that part of his philosophy remains outside the scope of our investigations; we have concentrated only on the question about the status of the kind of thinking, and the kind of claims, that go under the heading 'speculative philosophy'.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In 2.3 we introduced the ontological difference as a perspective from which to look at Whitehead's philosophy. We concluded on methodological grounds that the ontological difference does not present a fatal stumbling block for speculative

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<sup>228</sup> PR 113. Whitehead uses the word *feeling* for a so-called positive prehension. A prehension is positive when it is the taking up of an object in the concrescence. A prehension is negative when it excludes an object from being taken up into the real constitution of an occasion. A negative prehension is said to 'eliminate from feeling' (PR 23). Since the whole nature of an occasion is toprehend, and since Whitehead uses *feeling* not only with this technical distinction in mind, but also as a general term indicating the centrality of prehension, he can say that his philosophy is the *Critique of Pure Feeling*.

philosophy. We can now complete that argument *from the perspective of the concept of an occasion*.

Occasions are not part of all there is over against the 'being' of all there is, nor formal 'being' over against the entities that are. There are many modes of being, but they all refer to the being of occasions, of which they are aspects. Only occasions have being in the sense which is basic to Whitehead, namely 'power' or 'possessing agency'.<sup>229</sup> 'To be' means to be *an* occasion; apart from occasions there is mere nothingness. But on the level of occasions 'to be' can no longer be thought of as the presence of an object-over-against-me (the present actuality of a 'thing in the world', there to be experienced and used); occasions 'happen', they constitute a duration of experience which is a dynamic process of unification (becoming), and so they have their being in their becoming. The notions 'world' and 'object' receive their meaning as partial abstractions from the totality of the occasion. They refer to stages within the act of becoming.<sup>230</sup> The point of saying that occasions are not part of the world's

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<sup>229</sup> Whitehead writes in several places that he accepts the platonic 'definition of being as *dynamis*' - a word he translates as power, or agency. See AI 129. We can see what 'power' means for Whitehead. It is not a force exerting influence but the self-actualization of connectedness. Agency, then, is first and foremost activity of becoming.

The reference to Plato is to the *Sophist*, 247e. Cornford criticized Whitehead for using the inaccurate translation of Jowett (Cornford 1960, p. vii). In Cornford's translation the phrase 'definition of being' is changed to 'mark of being'. Cornford remarks that a 'mark of being' is not a 'definition of being'. True as this may be, the use Whitehead put the word 'power' to, is not hindered by it. Also, translating *dynamis* as 'power' is not uncontroversial either. But Whitehead has his own account of what it is that entities out of the nature of reality influence each other.

<sup>230</sup> To explain: We can give an analysis of the structure of the act of becoming. Although an occasion is an original whole in which all parts presuppose each other, we can still say that it is structured according to 'earlier' and 'later' phases: it is a process, and a process is a passage. Leaving aside the details, we can say an occasion has three phases. Its first phase consists in the reception of its antecedents. In this phase there is no real distinction between the occasion's actual world (the environment provided by the antecedents) and the occasion itself:

The initial situation . . . can be termed the initial phase of the new occasion. It can equally well be termed the 'actual world' relative to that occasion. It has a certain unity of its own, expressive of its capacity for providing the objects requisite for a new occasion, and also expressive of its conjoint activity whereby it is essentially the primary phase of a new occasion. (AI 179)

For the further analysis of this first phase, see PR III, II, I. Here it is important to note that the terms 'world' and 'object' as used in this quotation cannot be taken in their common meaning of 'the totality of what there is' and 'an independently existing thing in the world': on that assumption the quotation is quite unintelligible. Both 'world' and 'object', although they explicate what is involved in the notion of an occasion, presuppose the notion of an occasion. Taken by themselves they are abstractions from

content is to show precisely that 'world' and 'object' become derivative notions, relative to occasions and abstract in the sense that they presuppose and find their meaning against the background of the notion of 'occasions in their connectedness'. *Ergo* there is no point in saying that occasions are 'in the world', nor in saying that they are the conditions of possibility of the world and its contents (provided we do not redefine the notions of 'world' and 'thing in the world' as required by the notion of an occasion).

At the same time we do not have to deny anything empirical. On the contrary, the occasions-analysis is nothing but an account of the nature of the empirical. To give an example: in Whitehead's philosophy we do not say something like 'in reality what we call 'trees' or 'persons' or 'things' are nothing but vast collections of occasions' (which are then thought of as somehow 'there'<sup>231</sup>); we say that what the actual existence of all these things, their reality, amounts to is what is spelled out in the notion of occasion.<sup>232</sup> That *does* involve a claim about the nature of what we find in the world (for example organic unity, participation in others, uniqueness, novelty, becoming, absence of priorly realized bearers of acts) and can insofar be called ontic. Thereby a criterion has been given to distinguish fully actual existence from derivative existence. Indeed we cannot avoid the task of describing the generic structure of things in terms of the occasions-analysis. But *at the same time* 'occasion' is what it means to 'be'.

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the process of concrescence and as such do not explain at all how it is that an act of becoming *genuinely connects* to its antecedents.

The second phase of the occasion is constituted by the transformation of the antecedents that provided the first phase in the form of the selection for exclusion or reception of certain aspects of the antecedents, in the light of the form of unity that governs the act (it can be an act of mere continuation of the environment or an act of response to it, in a variety of ways - conscious or unconscious). When all indeterminations, i.e. all room for becoming, has been resolved in the complete determinedness of the selection-and-response process, the act of becoming reaches its third phase, its 'satisfaction'. The satisfaction is the perishing of becoming, and with that the perishing of the subjective immediacy of experience (for that is precisely what becoming is). The act is now over, and can take on its function as element of the actual world of a next occasion. The perishing is the objectification of the entity in its successors. Here again we see how the notion of 'object'/'objectification' is as much explicative of the notion of an occasion, as the other way around.

<sup>231</sup> But behind this notion of mere 'thereness' lies the idea of the absolutely positioned substance, an idea which can have no fundamental meaning in process metaphysics.

<sup>232</sup> So a 'collection of occasions' is itself also an occasion, or else the collection has no localization and hence cannot be. There is nothing outside actual occasions.

Furthermore, an occasion is the realization of its own determinateness. Its 'character' or 'form' is not something over against it, but a possibility which *it* realizes. It is the actualized possibility, the individual mode, to use an at first sight contradictory notion, or the concrete universal.<sup>233</sup> And precisely *because* it is not itself an 'object' or 'thing' characterized by a cross-section of all possible qualities, but the happening of determinateness, precisely *because* it is an event, we may perhaps say that the absolute difference between the ontic and the ontological may be seen, from the point of view of Whitehead's 'occasionalism', as itself a result of the primacy of substance metaphysics. In a metaphysics of process it loses its fundamental status.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> I base the term 'individual mode' on PR 7, where Whitehead says that we can approach his philosophy by saying that 'Spinoza's "modes" ... become the sheer actualities; so that, though analysis of them increases our understanding, it does not lead us to the discovery of any higher grade of reality.' It is of course absolutely vital to resist the temptation of making the modes into substances of their own. That would lead to the meaninglessness of the notion of an 'individual mode'. If we see them as events we escape meaninglessness. (And then it must again be remarked that there is still the danger of taking events as objects (as indeed I contend is ubiquitous in process philosophy). Another process philosopher, Wilfrid Sellars, warned of this mistake which immediately vitiates any fruitful understanding of process philosophy, coming from a slightly different angle in his lectures on the foundations of a philosophy of pure process: 'Of course, if one so uses the term "object" that every basic item is an object, absolute processes would be objects. But this move would have to be supported by a theory of the categories. Otherwise, to rest in the idea that absolute processes are *basic entities* and *therefore* objects, would be to paper over the distinctive grammar of process sentences. One gains a new sense of the importance of the scholastic distinction between *categories* and *transcendentals*, and begins to find new power in the idea of ontology as the theory of being *qua* being' (Sellars 1981, p. 57). For a full discussion of Sellars' process philosophy, see Seibt 1990.)

<sup>234</sup> As I said in the previous chapter, these suggestions are intended as a way of approaching Whitehead's metaphysics and getting clear about what goes on in it. To be sure, the ontological difference loses its fundamental status in process philosophy. However, a fully elaborated investigation of the relation between the ontological difference, the notion of substance and the notion of occasion must be referred to a future date.

## 4 Recapitulation and Conclusion - Philosophy and Daily Life

‘Philosophy is a widespread, ill-defined discipline, performing many services for the upgrowth of humanity’, Whitehead writes in his tribute to John Dewey.<sup>235</sup> For example, philosophy illuminates and criticizes contemporary modes of thought and behaviour but it also contributes to our knowledge (even if only at the most general level).

But for Whitehead philosophy also has what one might call a ‘therapeutic’ function. Among its many other projects and aspects philosophy is the critique of abstractions, meaning that it tries to express as adequately as possible the nature of concrete existence, thereby showing how the abstractions we employ in science and life arise out of the richness of concrete experience. For Whitehead, philosophy is explanatory of abstraction, and not of concreteness.

We have seen how the tendency of the human mind to take an abstraction for full concrete existence is one of the most common sins of reflective thought. It is deeply engrained in the structure of our language, which allows virtually anything to be made into the subject of a predication, and it is very useful for getting on in daily life<sup>236</sup>, but in metaphysics it turns into a great handicap. This ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ we find in science as well as in philosophy and daily life. We have considered by way of example scientific materialism and the mind-body dualism of modern philosophy. For Whitehead, speculative philosophy, which he defined as the attempt to frame an intelligible, coherent, adequate scheme of notions with which all of our experience can be interpreted, is nothing but a sustained attempt at avoiding misplaced concreteness. For him, the success of a philosophy is to be measured by its comparative avoidance of this fallacy. Speculative philosophy, because it takes into

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<sup>235</sup> ‘John Dewey and his Influence’, in ESP 91f.

<sup>236</sup> Because it leads us to treat as *one thing* that which behaves identically on different occasions. Thus it is a great instrument in structuring our awareness according to the regular patterns that in fact obtain. We talk of ‘the table’ because in the different occasions of our experience of it, it does not behave differently. ‘Behaviour’ can here be taken so loosely as to include temporal continuity. In the case of human beings, bodily continuity is usually sufficient for personal identity over time, but when someone changes sufficiently in opinion and behaviour, we are not so sure anymore. Sometimes we will say things like *John has become a different person altogether*, and that will be the best we can do.

account all of experience and tries to form a coherent interpretation of it, leads the mind back to the full concreteness of experience.

For Whitehead, one of the fatal common presuppositions in modern and contemporary thought is the distrust of speculative philosophy. Disavowing speculative philosophy puts life as it is lived out of sight, because only the speculative dimension in philosophy parallels, or explicitly addresses, the fullness of our lives *as such*. And when philosophy becomes irrelevant to daily life, it also ceases to perform its function of critic of abstractions, because abstractions can only be understood (and criticized) when the concrete background against which they stand out is kept in sight.

Hume says that philosophy is the 'sovereign antidote to superstition'.<sup>237</sup> Allowing for a looseness of fit, we can say that misplaced concreteness and superstition carry a lot in common; the demise of speculative philosophy and the upsurge of myths are two sides of the same coin. Here the antithesis between logos and mythos proves to have something left to say. For Whitehead, mythology in its bad sense is exemplified by the human inclination to obscurantism, that is to a narrow-minded adherence to a limited method. Like the clergy before, today the scientists have become the obscurantists, and science functions in society, at least to some extent, as the reigning mythology (FR 44). The distrust of speculative philosophy will, according to Whitehead, prove as fatal for science as for philosophy.

Speculative thinking - the attempt to discover the ultimate generalities that obtain in reality - is itself essentially untrammelled by method (2.1). Its function is to discover the general reasons that lie behind more limited reasons and to understand all methods (in science as well as in practical life, in ethics, commerce, religion and art) as coordinated in the nature of things, which itself is only to be grasped by transcending all method.<sup>238</sup> Speculative reason and the freedom of thought to experiment, consider and reconsider cannot be separated without destroying them both. Whitehead sometimes describes the activity of philosophizing as imaginative generalization. Typically, we start with an area of experience we are familiar with

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<sup>237</sup> Hume 1755, p. 577.

<sup>238</sup> FR 65.

(e.g. our own psychological field, or mathematics) and we try to generalize their structures so that they become applicable to other fields as well. In other words, the generalized structure should afford an interpretation of other fields as well. In these other fields, the interpretation may contradict other previously accepted interpretations, or not. It may show a looseness of fit, or not. Most always a speculative generalization will turn out to be only of partial value. But the criterion of good philosophy is not finality, but progress.<sup>239</sup>

It would be a complete mistake to think that the speculative enterprise aims at constructing an objective synthesis of the present state of the sciences and the other fields of knowledge and experience in terms of a general world-picture. Not only is the notion of a 'general picture' alien to the non-representationalist epistemology of Whitehead<sup>240</sup>, there is also no way in which generalities can make up concrete fact, and concrete fact is what we live in and what we try to come to understand in philosophy. Generality is indeed inherent in concrete fact. Without generality there would be no consciousness, and no philosophy. Therefore, like all else, it requires explanation. But a congregation of generalities does not issue in concreteness. We have seen how the relation between generals and particulars is that of *expression* or *exhibition*.

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<sup>239</sup> Note that this way of describing the nature of speculative thinking involves the denial of an absolute starting-point for thought (either in an a priori, a 'fundamentum inconcussum veritatis' or in an uninterpreted sphere of givenness). We are always already in the midst of interpretations, schematizations which enter into our experiences and which form the raw material for speculation. There is no clear dividing line or strict categorial difference between perception, conscious awareness, practical intelligence, science, philosophy. Philosophy does not initiate interpretations (PR 14). Here we can see a parallel with pre-modern thought, in which philosophy starts with the practical and reflective knowledge we already have about the world and builds on that, whereas a typical move in modern philosophy is to 'clear the mind' completely and rebuild the whole edifice of knowledge from scratch. Later on we will see the reverse of this: speculative philosophy can in its turn influence and *change* immediate experience (in the sense of 'the experienced world of daily life' - PR 4, 156) itself. The phrase 'elucidation of immediacy' then acquires another, more profound, meaning. Cp. MT 125: 'The concrete reality is the starting-point of the process of individual experience, and it is the goal in the rationalization of consciousness. The prize at the goal is the enhancement of experience by consciousness and rationality.'

<sup>240</sup> On this topic, and the obvious relation to Heidegger's 'Die Zeit des Weltbildes', cp. Hampe 1990, p. 82.



Speculative philosophy is a descriptive enterprise which attempts to make manifest the fundamental evidence as to the nature of things.<sup>241</sup> In the activity of thinking, the evidence is presupposed. In a sense we already know what we are trying to understand. Therefore, philosophy cannot be proved in the strict sense of the word. For all proof depends on self-evidence. What we do in philosophy is better described by phrases like these: Philosophy *displays* the self-evidence of basic truths, it *produces* or *elicits* self-evidence. 'The aim of philosophy is sheer disclosure' (MT 49).

But what is in itself evident, is not at first evident to us. Conscious experience arises in large part by emphasizing certain aspects of experience and ignoring others. Without a large amount of discipline and selection (meaning always exclusion of some, inclusion of others), it cannot come about or be maintained. Conscious experience has the totality of things as its background - but it can only be the specific experience it is by selecting for emphasis the items that fit its own purposes. Philosophy tries to recover the totality obscured by the selection and make it manageable for the human mind.

One of the first tasks we encounter, then, is to inquire into the structure of our immediate experience. Whitehead holds that one of the most basic and relevant facts about the world and our direct experience of it remains incomprehensible in most, if not all, modern philosophies. He writes:

[M]odern philosophy hinges round the difficulty of describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal. The result always does violence to that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, our purposes, and which we enjoy in spite of our lack of phrases for its verbal analysis. We find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures; whereas, under some disguise or other, orthodox philosophy can only introduce us to solitary substances, each enjoying an illusory experience: 'O Bottom, thou art changed! what do I see on thee?' (PR 49-50)

The world of daily life, in which we live and move and have our being, is a world of interrelations, of mutual dependencies, of change, enjoyment, public facts and

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<sup>241</sup> MT 48.

private feelings; a solidary world in which we experience the ‘self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many’.<sup>242</sup> If philosophy is to bring the mind back to concrete experience, it must be able to acknowledge the character of immediate experience as expressed in the above quotation: we are immediately aware of others; therefore these others must be *in* our experience *themselves*, and our experience has to be our actual existence. For if we were something real prior to our experiences (say the priorly realized subject), the real inherence of the others in our experience would still not explain the direct sense of sharing the world. Our experiences, and with them our relations to the others would be like the properties of classical substances: the inessential qualifications that allow for change. If experience as relatedness is to work as an analysis of the character of immediate experience as presented in the quotation, then relatedness must be more than an accident, a modification of a substance: relatedness must be the real connection of particulars. Therefore, not only can experience no longer be understood in terms of an affection of the subject by universals (qualia, sense data), for what is experienced is the individual itself; also and moreover, the individuals that experience and are experienced must themselves be through and through relational, that is connective. Whitehead’s world is a world of pure experiences. An act of experience, i.e. an entity whose whole nature it is toprehend (PR 41) is itself a ‘connective’. For prehension is not a form of making contact with others, but a form of participation in which others enter into the real constitution of the act of experience. The occasions-analysis in terms of *expression, prehension, connection, process, becoming* is the speculative explication of this participative relation. It should not be taken as offering an explanation of why it is that others are in our experience themselves, but as an analysis of the content of that notion. Whitehead expresses this for the concept of knowledge in *The Concept of Nature*.<sup>243</sup> Since experience is the basis for knowledge (PR 158) we can insert ‘experience’ for ‘knowledge’ in that passage. We then get the following account: ‘Experience is ultimate. There can be no explanation of the “why” of experience; we can only describe the “what” of experience. Namely we can analyse the content and its internal relations, but we

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<sup>242</sup> PR 145.

<sup>243</sup> CN 32.

cannot explain why there is experience. Thus causal nature is a metaphysical chimera; though there is a need of a metaphysics whose scope transcends the limitation to nature. The object of such a metaphysical science is not to explain experience, but exhibit in its utmost completeness our concept of reality.'

Any recourse to a cause explaining why there is experience of others, be it in the form of an object impinging on the instruments of reception of the experient entity, or in the form of an underlying or pre-given subject or act, that 'does the experiencing' lands us straight away in the unintelligibility of immediately experienced daily life. We 'start with participation'<sup>244</sup> and through an elucidation of what is involved in that we try to exhibit our understanding of reality.

This means that we either accept the unintelligibility<sup>245</sup>, or try to make sense of the notion of the purely relational, experiential actual entity, the act without an actor in terms of the particular nature of speculative analysis. I have tried to show that it is a good way of reading Whitehead's metaphysics to see it as an attempt to do just that, and how the attempt involves a reconsideration of the nature of speculative rationality as expressive coherence.

Thus, within the framework of metaphysics - that is, within the framework of a theory of being qua being - Whitehead completely overthrows the notion of substance, as that which does not require anything else in order to exist or to be understood, or that which is always a subject and never a predicate. But he does not renounce the question of metaphysics, What is the nature of an actually existing entity, what is the nature of concrete existence? Whitehead accepts the 'general Aristotelian principle', as he calls it, that apart from actually existing entities there is nothing. This means that the metaphysical configuration of inquiry into the being of beings (entities) remains the dominant motive for Whitehead. For him, being is always the being of beings. There can be no such thing as a basic ontological difference between being and beings; for Whitehead that would be a move induced by a fallacious conception of the nature of actual existence (the substantialist), which

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<sup>244</sup> See first block-quotation in 3.5.3.

<sup>245</sup> In Whitehead's view this is the line taken by Hume, Kant and most philosophers after Kant. See PR 156.

must, and indeed can be, avoided by another conception of actual existence, instead of by leaving metaphysics behind. As indicated above, abandoning metaphysics can only end in superstition.

Whitehead sees his own philosophy as standing squarely within the metaphysical tradition, but as diverging from its main habit of thought (that became ubiquitous in the Middle Ages) of an undue emphasis on Aristotle's logic, which led to the mostly implicit presupposition that the finally adequate form of analysis of actual existence is the subject-predicate mode of statement. We must remember that Whitehead is one of the founders of modern logic. Modern logic dispenses with Aristotelian logic more or less altogether, certainly insofar as the subject-predicate form of statement is concerned. Therewith a substance-quality ontology has become less obviously mandatory. (Think, for example, of the possibilities for an ontology of relations which moves outside the sphere of the classical treatment of relations, made possible by propositional-function analysis.) For we can express one and the same proposition by the sentence 'Socrates is wise' as well as by the sentence 'Wisdom characterizes Socrates'. The basic aspect of the distinction between linguistic subject and linguistic predicate, namely that the subject is always a complete expression and the predicate always an incomplete expression, here vanishes. The distinction between complete and incomplete expressions is more important than before, but the possibilities for analysis of linguistic structures have become richer. How could we say that the distinction between complete and incomplete expressions, as reflected by the subject-predicate form of proposition, can be used to establish a corresponding ontological distinction between complete and incomplete entities, if the two forms of statement given are so to speak, 'stylistic' variations of one and the same proposition? <sup>246</sup>

I think it is not too far fetched to suggest that Whitehead thought that once the shackles of Aristotelian logic had been lifted, it became possible for metaphysics to

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<sup>246</sup> See Hampe 1990, p. 77f. I am inspired by Hampe's account here. He bases himself on Ramsey (1978), who refers to Whitehead in his article 'Universals'. The claim at issue is not at all accepted commonly in the philosophy of language. On the contrary, the distinction between subject and predicate has been and remains crucial for formal semantics. But we can see what Whitehead (and Ramsey) were thinking of.

liberate itself from substance-quality modes of thought, and assigning them their proper place in metaphysical analysis. In this sense, Whitehead's philosophy, though quite self-consciously metaphysical, is entirely a product of the twentieth century. But instead of abandoning the attempt to express in an intelligible, rational way an understanding of reality, Whitehead suggests that we now are in a position to solve the inherent problems that have beset metaphysics for so long. Other problems will probably emerge, but that does not mean we cannot make progress. Progress is not so much possible because we now have a better logic - logic is unsuited as an instrument for metaphysical analysis, according to Whitehead - but rather because the developments in logic have cleared a set of basic metaphysical presuppositions, and intrinsically problematical ones at that, namely the substance-quality or particular-universal distinction.

What are the basic divergences from substance metaphysics, then? Whitehead introduces them by focussing on the distinction between particular and universal, a distinction he rejects. For the 'particular' is conceived as being just its individual self with no necessary relevance to any other particular. A primary substance, according to Aristotle, is neither asserted of a subject nor present in a subject.

For Whitehead this is not true. He holds that an actual entity *is* present in other actual entities (it is his basic concept of immediate experience explicated as the prehensive connectedness of predecessor and successor act). In fact, allowing for degrees of relevance we must say that every actual entity enters into the constitution of every other actual entity. Whitehead's philosophy is 'mainly devoted to the task of making clear the notion of "being present in another entity"'.<sup>247</sup> Experience then becomes a fundamental category for metaphysical thought. For it is only when we take the concept of experience as fundamental that we can devise a way of understanding the presence of others in the act as neither (a) presence as representation (which would destroy the immediacy), nor (b) presence as being a proper part of the experient entity (in the sense in which a wheel is a proper part of a car). When experience is the fundamental category, objecthood is not; an experience is itself essentially an integration of others in a new act. The integration is temporal,

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<sup>247</sup> PR 50.

in the sense of involving passage. Without a moving on which *is itself* the taking up of others in the new unity the very thought of a real inherence which is neither presence (a) nor presence (b) loses its meaning. This is the hardest thought; it involves making the notions of *passage* or *passing on* intrinsic to the notion of an entity.

The 'really reals', the entities insofar as they *are*, are 'experiential' in that they involve the presence in them of others. What Whitehead has done, is to ontologize empiricism, or rather he has framed a theory about the dimensions in which all existence has to be placed, and these dimensions present themselves to us in the guise of the topic of our immediate experience (in the sense of 'the empirical'). The distinction between experience and actual existence, and with that distinction, the distinctions between body and mind, substance and quality, matter and form, being-for-itself and being-in-itself - for these are all connected through the notion of an entity which needs nothing besides itself in order to exist - are redefined on quite different principles. The basic structure of actual existence is best described for Whitehead as experiential, and therefore dynamic: it is the unification of many into one, by which the one comes into being. The unification, which is concretely speaking an event or a happening, is the self-determination of a definite perspective on the many antecedent entities the becoming entity finds as its actual world. But its actual world is nothing over and above the entity itself in the first stages of its becoming. Here we find the real presence of the entities in each other. The actual entity is a connective, and nothing but a connective. It has no existence apart from the immanence in it of others. It realizes itself in connecting to what already is. As we have said above, connectivity is essentially a temporal notion. For Whitehead, interaction means transaction.<sup>248</sup> The immediacy of experience can reach out to the things experienced precisely because the actual entity (the act of experience or self-actualization) has the world for its first phase. It repeats settled fact, which is a real presence within itself, with novel immediacy of feeling. Although we can distinguish several phases in the act of becoming, we must not think of it as the sum of its parts. It is essentially a whole.

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<sup>248</sup> The phrase, of course, is Dewey's.

In the next phase of actualization a determinate perspective on the actual world is developed. This may involve elaborate selection and transformation of characteristics of the actual world, but it may also (in the case of permanence) be a simple repetition and passing on of inherited structure. In any case, the experienced antecedents are felt with a 'subjective form', which determines *how* the antecedents are experienced and consequently *what* the experient entity is *for itself*. This is the realm of self-enjoyment, private fact (where, in certain high-grade entities, consciousness comes in). When the perspective is fully determinate, the entity is complete; it reaches its satisfaction which is at the same time its perishing. The subjective immediacy of the happening vanishes and the entity, now become fully real, is added to the others as an object for future acts; its existence beyond its becoming is its objectification in its successors.

Whitehead makes it perfectly clear that the temporality of the process of becoming concrete should not be understood in terms of a succession of nows, but in terms of the three tenses past, present, future. The occasion is not in physical time, but is essentially tensed: it involves references to the past and to the future. But even these, Whitehead says, should not be understood primarily in the meaning they have for the measurable time of science and civilised life.<sup>249</sup> The tenses are generalized determinations of the act of experience, which is always an act of self-actualization, out of the past towards its satisfaction which conditions its future beyond itself. The temporal structure of the act of experience is what accounts for the fact that the connectivity between acts of experience is a real participation. The famous formula 'taking time seriously' means for Whitehead taking it seriously as an analogon<sup>250</sup>, a partial exemplification, of the nature of actual existence. That is why Whitehead uses words like 'process', 'creativity', 'event' or 'passage' rather than 'time':

Nature is a process. As in the case of everything directly exhibited in sense-awareness, there can be no explanation of this characteristic of nature. All that

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<sup>249</sup> CN 54.

<sup>250</sup> I owe this expression to dr. James Bradley, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

can be done is to use language which may speculatively demonstrate it, and also to express the relation of this factor in nature to other factors.

It is an exhibition of the process of nature that each duration happens and passes. The process of nature can also be termed the passage of nature. I definitely refrain at this stage from using the word 'time', since the measurable time of science and of civilized life generally merely exhibits some aspects of the more fundamental fact of the passage of nature. (CN 53-54; note, by the way, the use here made of *explanation, expression, speculative demonstration, exhibition*)

To sum up: The immediately experienced world enters into the act of experience; this is the essential connectivity or relationality of the real understood as the togetherness of particulars. The connectivity is dynamical. The subject of experience realizes itself in the experience (Whitehead sometimes uses 'superject' to bring this out more clearly) and can in no sense be said to be standing behind it, as a priorly realized real. The subject realizes itself in a process of determination, within a real, given world. The dimensions of subjectivity, objectivity and dynamical self-determination within a common world of other entities can be understood as the structural features of the event-like nature of actual existence. Being actual means being an event (an act, or as Whitehead says an 'occasion'), or better: it means happening, coming to pass. The happening is Whitehead's answer to Aristotle's question What is *ousia*?

Thought, including philosophy, is the elucidation of immediacy (PR 4). In the case of speculative philosophy it amounts to the elucidation of what is in fact self-evident. But what is in itself evident, is not at first self-evident. The self-evidence of immediacy stands in need of elucidation, at least insofar as we are trying to frame a conscious understanding of it. The mind goes astray, and philosophy should be there to provide the corrective. But philosophy brings immediate experience back to consciousness in two ways: in providing an understanding of the nature of direct experience, philosophy also renders immediacy itself clearer, because our understanding is a determining factor in our experience just like anything else. 'Elucidation of immediacy' is a subjective as well as an objective genitive.

With this, reflection on experience becomes a factor in the transformation of experience. The rationality of speculative thinking, which we have found to consist in the expressive coherence of its fundamental notions, and its creative capacity of



bringing out into the open and even changing our lives, our modes of feeling and behaviour, flow back perfectly into one another. Here we find another classical motive of metaphysics, redefined on new principles. For we can now understand the old definition of man as the rational animal as saying that man, in thinking, creates his own environment: the conscious, lucid immediacy of daily life. In a philosophy of process, the elucidation is never final or complete, but neither is it a helpless private phantasy. As we think, we live.

A precise analysis of the status of speculative thinking has given us the instrument with which to interpret Whitehead's theory of occasions in such a way that the received interpretation of his philosophy as a naive, pre-critical metaphysical realism tailored to fit early twentieth-century physics turns out to be inadequate. It is true that Whitehead explicitly wanted to provide a metaphysics for the science and culture of his day, but he did a better job than even his defenders have in general thought. With the at first sight arbitrary move of substituting events for substances, Whitehead has succeeded in providing at least the basics of a rational philosophy of existence as groundless, creative event in which science and contemporary culture find their unifying reflection. What fruits it may carry for what concerns us most today is a question we will have to leave for another occasion.

## Appendix: 'Anything is Something' - Whitehead and Edmund Wilson

Although we have been examining a metaphysical theory for which concreteness is at the heart of all thought and all existence, the exposition has been mostly quite abstract. In this appendix we want to give an example of one of the ways in which Whitehead's metaphysics of occasions may perform its role of elucidating experience in a form which is more than a theoretical analysis, a form which enters into experience itself, affecting it, making it clearer.

Of course, a theoretical analysis understood and accepted as such also has an influence on how we experience the world. That influence consists in highlighting more or less abstract patterns that obtain in reality, making things more manageable. The way in which speculative philosophy affects experience, in distinction to this, consists - in accord with its objective - in intensifying our awareness of the fact of existence as such and what it exhibits. Since it addresses our existence as such and completely, and since it abstracts from nothing itself but explicitly attempts to coordinate all factors of existence, it enters more intimately into our experience than other forms of thought - *if* it enters into our experience. The difference between the two (equally indispensable) points of view is that between, for example, knowing everything there is to know about trees, and seeing a tree as existing in its own right, as having a value for itself, as sharing a world with others, in short, as *being*. Ultimately the two points of view entail each other, for knowing everything there is to know includes knowing about the 'feeling of reality' - to repeat Russell's phrase we quoted earlier (3.4) - and a grasp of the meaning of being remains incomplete without an awareness of the reality of factual knowledge and without downright knowing *what there is*.

The example we will explore is the way in which Edmund Wilson, the literary critic who wrote the immensely influential analysis of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature *Axel's Castle* (1931), made use of the thought of Whitehead, in framing his understanding, his interpretation, of the themes and motives of western literature between 1870 and 1930. This period marks the beginning of modernism in literature, and it also marks a new beginning in philosophy.

We will look at three aspects of Whitehead's influence on Wilson: (1) Wilson's use, in *Axel's Castle*, of Whitehead's analysis of romanticism in *Science and the Modern World*. Wilson shows how that analysis of cultural developments at the beginning of the nineteenth century provides a key for understanding cultural developments a century after. (2) Wilson's use of the event analysis of actual existence in his interpretation of key figures in early twentieth-century literature, also in *Axel's Castle*. (3) Finally, we will say a few words about the role Whitehead plays in Wilson's only published novel, *I Thought of Daisy* (1929). Since it is our aim in this appendix to illustrate what we have been saying about Whitehead, and not to present an exhaustive analysis of the work of Wilson, our treatment of Wilson's work is strictly limited to bringing out the relevance of Whitehead's speculative philosophy in relation to it. No attempt at literary scholarship has been made.

The fact that an important literary critic as Wilson has made such profitable use of a neglected philosopher like Whitehead can be seen as an argument for the claim that speculative philosophy addresses vital concerns of human life. Conversely, we think that an awareness of the explicitly metaphysical nature of the topics dealt with by the modernist writers, which all turn around experience in one sense or another, such as can be gathered from the philosophical perspective Wilson brings to bear on literature, can help us to see with more clarity that the concerns of the towering figures of the modernist period - Proust and Joyce, and a few others - are *ontological* in nature, rather than *psychological*. The term *stream of consciousness* is about *reality*, rather than about *subjective experience*. In fact, the dichotomy between subject and object is precisely what is overcome in these writers.

But first a couple of short remarks by way of introduction. Edmund Wilson, America's foremost literary critic during the better part of the twentieth century, was born in 1895. He was educated at Princeton, where he met Scott Fitzgerald. During the 1920s he made his way into the literary scene in New York, first as a writer, but after he had recognized and accepted the fact that his first novel, *I Thought of Daisy* wasn't a very good one, he turned to literary criticism. In that role he played a great part in establishing a determinate self-consciousness among the modernist writers in America. He was editor of *Vanity Fair* for many years and wrote a large number of

books on American literature and a wide variety of other topics (to name just two: the Russian Revolution (*To the Finland Station*) and the culture of Canada (*O Canada*)). He was married several times (one of his wives was Mary McCarthy). He died in 1972. By that time he was something of a classic, and that had the result that interest in his work faded during the seventies and eighties. But since a couple of years the number of studies about him increases, and in 1995 a voluminous biography was published.<sup>251</sup>

The book that made Wilson famous is his 1931 *Axel's Castle*. It is a collection of essays on Yeats, Valéry, Eliot, Proust, Joyce and Gertrude Stein. A thing to notice here, in the light of the distinctly American emphasis of his subsequent writings, is that only two of these writers are Americans - Eliot and Stein -, and they both spent most of their lives in Europe, Eliot trying to cover up his being an American, Stein trying to find the meaning of her being an American. (Stein, by the way, was of German-Jewish descent, and didn't learn to speak English until she was five years old.)

Whitehead was much older than Wilson. He was born in 1861 in Kent, and moved to America to begin a career as a speculative philosopher at Harvard in 1924 - when he was already 63 years old. He met with quite an amount of enthusiasm, and so did his writings. But that didn't last long, for the anti-metaphysical movements of logical positivism and analytic philosophy soon started to grow into a considerable factor in the philosophical atmosphere of the Anglo-American world and began to spread widely during the thirties. First in England, but later also in America. After the Second World War speculative philosophy, and with it Whitehead's thought, ceased to be important presences in American philosophy.

In this context it is worth noticing that the writers who more than others determined the character of the twentieth century, didn't share in the prevailing attitude in philosophical circles - the attitude of disdain for philosophy conceived of as the creative development of ideas with which to understand the nature of reality, ourselves and the world we live in as a whole. We all know about Eliot's close affiliation to F.H. Bradley, but also Bergson and William James (who may not be the

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<sup>251</sup> Meyers 1995.

prototype of a metaphysician, but who surely doesn't satisfy the 'profile' of the basic twentieth-century philosopher - either in America, or on the Continent) have had their influence on people like Pound and Proust.

And Whitehead also is among the speculative philosophers who are markedly present in the thought and work of some of the modernist writers as well. Before we turn to *Axel's Castle*, we want to quote a short passage from Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by way of illustration:

[T]here at her house I met Gertrude Stein. I was impressed by the coral brooch she wore and by her voice. I may say that only three times in my life I have met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead. I have met many important people, I have met several great people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang. In no one of these cases have I been mistaken. In this way my new full life began. (1933a, p. 5)

What was the nature of the thoughts that occupied the modernists? Let's begin with a sweeping statement. If philosophy from the seventeenth century onwards and the rise of science (Whitehead speaks of an 'avalanche' (SMW 80)) had resulted in anything, it surely was - on the level of reflection - a dualism between mind and nature. Whitehead writes in SMW, that on the scientific scheme of physics 'nature is a dull affair' - comprised of empty space and particles moving around blindly, aimlessly. In fact, he says, on this view 'the poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind. Nature is . . . merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly. However you disguise it, this is the practical outcome of the characteristic scientific philosophy which closed the seventeenth century' (SMW 54).

Taking the model of nature provided by physics as a description of what is 'really real' issued in the radical and unrepairable distinction between mind and nature, external world and solipsist experience. By accepting the scientific scheme as the most concrete rendering of fact, Whitehead says, philosophy has been ruined. For it has thereby condemned itself to a juggling with abstractions (a harsh criticism of the

entire philosophical activity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries!) which, out of the nature of the case, will never result in anything, because the starting point is tainted with the one philosophical sin, mistaking an abstraction for the real thing. According to Whitehead, philosophy is nothing but the attempt to think without committing the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, and the success of a philosophy is to be measured by its comparative avoidance of misplaced concreteness. Ideally speaking, to think philosophically is to think concretely. It goes without saying that a large part of the effort goes into trying to make clear what 'concrete' means. Philosophy is reflection.

I think it is not going too far to say that what Whitehead is doing here, is 'postmodern', in the sense of deconstructing one of the 'Great Stories' of the modern era, as Lyotard would put it. It is here that Wilson hooks up with Whitehead. For Whitehead's concern really is the leading theme of the writers of the turn of the century, the relation between abstraction and experience. It all began a century before with romanticism, the first great wave of criticism of the promises of modernity which had received their final statement during the Enlightenment. Whitehead often refers to the poets of romanticism, most notably to Wordsworth. For Wordsworth mind and nature are one; the fields and the hills and the colours of the sunset are as much out there as in us, and we are as much in here, as in them. The explicit mention of common life and everyday experience we find so often in his poetry is an indication of Wordsworth's awareness of the basic position concrete experience has in human understanding. The following lines are a programmatic statement of his poetics of the unity of mind and outer nature:

Paradise, and groves  
Elysian, Fortunate Fields - like those of old  
Sought in the Atlantic Main - why should they be  
A history only of departed things,  
Or a mere fiction of what never was?  
  
For the discerning intellect of Man,  
When wedded to this goodly universe  
In love and holy passion, shall find these  
A simple produce of the common day.  
  
And the creation (by no lower name  
Can it be called) which they with blended might

Accomplish: - this is our high argument.<sup>252</sup>

According to Whitehead, the romantic reaction started with nature. It was 'a conscious reaction against the whole tone of the eighteenth century. That century approached nature with the abstract analysis of science, whereas Wordsworth opposes to the scientific abstractions his full concrete experience' (SMW 81).<sup>253</sup> In claiming a fundamental status for concrete experience, for 'the common day', the romantic reaction finds itself in the possession of a 'high argument' - in short, the demasking of modern philosophy's misplaced concreteness. Mind and nature are not two principles which stand by themselves each without essential reference to the other. Nature itself, as Whitehead says, 'exhibits entwined prehensive unities' (where 'prehension' is Whitehead's name for being present in another). Mind is one form of prehensive unity, and has its place in nature. Both terms are indefinable in isolation from each other. In the concrete experience of nature a situation presents itself that is not capable of being interpreted by means of the scientific scheme. It is the 'mysterious presence of surrounding things, which imposes itself on any separate element that we set up as an individual for its own sake' (SMW 83). The cognitive mode is not the most basic mode in which the unity of concrete experience manifests itself. Experience, Whitehead says, is at bottom 'concern', having an interest in another. He also talks about the brooding presences of nature, imposing themselves upon us. One all-pervading aspect of this is that of intrinsic value. Nature, in the romantic understanding of the word, exists for its own sake, is valuable in itself; it does not have to look to the future for it is an end in itself (PR 343). I think this claim is amply illustrated by the most common form of experience of nature. A beautiful sunset is valuable in itself, as it is. Witnessing it is in itself a good thing, one that satisfies us. Things just don't get better than that.<sup>254</sup> Thus, the notion of value is present in the very heart of the concept of concrete experience.

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<sup>252</sup> Stanzas taken from *The Prelude*; this particular selection was suggested to me by reading the first chapter of Abrams 1971.

<sup>253</sup> The romantic reaction was however not a reaction against the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment. See Abrams (1971), who indicates this by the very title of his study: *Natural Supernaturalism*.

<sup>254</sup> Or, in the case of undeniable natural suffering; things don't get worse than that.

Actual existence itself is the unity of concrete experience, and existence is existence for its own sake.

Whitehead uses the concept of 'event' for a further analysis of actuality. By highlighting the event-character of actual existence, Whitehead introduces temporality in his philosophy.

The transition of things, the passage of one to another, is for Whitehead an 'all-pervasive fact' (SMW 93), and the concept of event fixes attention to this, while combining it with actual unity. We should be aware not to reduce the transitoriness, or temporality of reality to 'mere linear procession of discrete entities' (SMW 93). For every determinate entity, there is a narrower determination of something which is presupposed by the first determination, and there is a wider determination into which the first fades by transition beyond itself. Any homely event is really composed of others, and is itself a real constitutive element of others, while, at the same time, it is wholly and totally itself. We have seen that 'transition' or 'passage' points to the fact that things are always within things and referent beyond themselves, in all sorts of (empirical) ways. If something, anything, fails to be thus subject to, as well as subject of, transition, it is not fully real. This serves as an explanation of the claim that actuality has an event-character. For only in terms of the category of event can we understand how it is that things, while being themselves and in order to be themselves, are *really* (and not as represented, as an instance of external part-whole relatedness or purely conceptually) present in others, and have others who are *really* (meaning in terms of their own being) present in them. To use Heidegger's words<sup>255</sup>: temporality is not a succession of nows, but the *ekstatikon*, the extendedness or directedness inherent in existence itself, whereby entities on account of their being are always beyond themselves. Whitehead calls it a 'perpetual perishing', whereby each entity is its own process of realization out of its actual world, and whereby each entity in that process of concrescence, becomes a datum in the actual world of another. Time is the horizon of being *per se*.

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<sup>255</sup> While discharging myself of the task to determine the relative positions of Heidegger and Whitehead on the nature of temporality.



In the opening chapter of *Axel's Castle* Wilson uses Whitehead's analysis of the romantic reaction to the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to establish a connection between romanticism in its first phase and the imaginative literature of the period 1870-1930. Now, as then, a fallacy of misplaced concreteness has stifled the experience of reality, and now, as then, literature reacts.

Wilson says that Whitehead drops his story after the romantic reaction to the eighteenth century, but that he has provided the key to what follows. For, during the nineteenth century, science advanced and evolutionary biology began to get a grip on the imaginations and reflections of western intellectuals not unequal to that of the scheme propounded by the physics of the seventeenth century. Again a form of absolutism arose, this time reducing human experience to a phantasma, unjustified in the face of the iron grip in which natural selection holds the human race. Where before nature was thought to be 'really' empty space and meaninglessly moving particles, now that picture was augmented by the thought that human affairs were 'really' nothing else than effects arising from the law of natural selection. The new insights into biology blended naturally with an atmosphere in the arts that had on its own begun to move away from romanticism to a more austere and level-headed classicism. So, naturalism set in. Flaubert, Hugo, Ibsen wrote their work. The reaction to this came originally, says Wilson, in France, as the movement known as symbolism. It corresponds to the romantic movement of a century before, in that the 'machine-like technique' of naturalism began to 'cramp the poet's imagination', it 'began to prove inadequate to convey what he feels'.<sup>256</sup>

The movement began to spread around the western world very soon, and eventually issued in modernist literature. Here it is important to note that what was 'wrong', if I may use that unsubtle word for a moment, with naturalism was not that certain aspects of our experience couldn't be accounted for, but that its whole notion of concrete experience, as something standing in need of a reduction to a level below that of conscious daily experience, but yet determining it (physical matter, the blind unconscious process of natural selection, etc.) was misconceived. In this, there is an

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<sup>256</sup> Wilson 1931, p. 16.

exact parallel to the romanticists' reaction to the scientific philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Wilson says: 'the world which we see about us is involved in some more intimate fashion than is ordinarily supposed with the things that go on in our minds', and: 'even our dreams and hallucinations are somehow bound up with reality'.<sup>257</sup> But that simply means, that what is present in personal experience, 'my world' should not, in Bergson's phrase, be referred away from itself to anything else as its ground, for in the world as it is present to me reality itself is found - not completely and all at once, but neither completely not. The task of philosophy and literature now becomes to find ways to understand and express this conception of personal experience, and to show how all kinds of human activity (such as science) fit into it. Concrete, actual existence has been shown to be experience. Thereby the concept of experience has been altered, so as to receive an ontological sense. We live in a world of pure experiences; this is not a reductionism but a way of letting the world back in, or conversely, of going out into the real world again, after human lived experience had been forced out of reality by the two successive moves of the new science and Darwinism. For Whitehead, his pluralist metaphysics of occasions was the way in which to open up reality, without renouncing modern physics and evolution theory. In fact, by bringing reality back to experience, he was in a position to understand the nature and value of science in a more coherent way than the scientists and modern philosophers could.

Just as for Whitehead this means that the subject-predicate form of proposition does not embody the most adequate mode of expression about the actual world, on account of the fact that the real inherence of entities in each other cannot be brought out in a subject-predicate mode of proposition, so the language experiment is a prominent feature of much modernist writing. In it, the goal usually is to convey the awareness of the immediately present unity of concrete experience, in which all things have their being. One thing that *appears to be the case*, that forces itself upon us once this perspective on experience is opened, is, as I have already said, the transition, or passage, inherent in reality as such. This transition is what Whitehead called 'process', and what in modernist literature became the 'stream of

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<sup>257</sup> Wilson 1931, p. 17.

consciousness': not a subjectivism, or psychologism, but the experiential, living, unity from which arise subject and object, mind and body, always new, in ever different constellations and characters. This can be illustrated, both concerning method and content, by the following passage in Stein's *A Long Gay Book*:

Anything is something. Not coming to anything is something. Loving is something. Needing coming to something is something. Loving is something. Anything is something.<sup>258</sup>

Here, things do not get referred away from themselves to something else as their ground ('anything is something'); this is what is constantly being repeated: it is the 'continuous presence'<sup>259</sup> of experience, and the whole is a stream. Only, here the stream doesn't get anywhere because it is about what it is to be real as such: the continuous presence of the stream where anything is something, namely that what it is: 'a rose is a rose is a rose'.

Wilson, though never an anglophile, felt great respect for Whitehead. Later in life he compared him to W.H. Auden, and described them as 'the two Englishmen of genius I have known who have embodied most authentically the strong creative English qualities - stout character, self-dependence, stubbornness in following their intuitions, combination of practicality with poetic and metaphysical thinking.'<sup>260</sup> He first got to read Whitehead's work in the early 1920s, by recommendation of his teacher Norman Kemp Smith. And a couple of years later, while working on *Axel's Castle* and *I Thought of Daisy*, he writes in his memoirs that one day when going home after a meeting, 'On the way up in the El, having had a couple of drinks before I started, I was transported into an ecstasy of enthusiasm thinking of A.N. Whitehead - crystalline abstract thought - a world of events continually progressing into novelty.'<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> In Stein 1933b, p. 21. Cp. MT 69: 'Again everything is something, which in its own way is real.'

<sup>259</sup> R. Stendhal 1994, p. 59.

<sup>260</sup> Wilson 1986, p. 298.

<sup>261</sup> Wilson 1975, p. 290.

Here we find the two aspects of Whitehead's thought that are central in his relevance to modernism - an understanding of actuality in terms of events, and the emphasis on novelty.

Where for Wordsworth the turn toward concrete experience meant first of all an awareness of the unity of mind and nature, for the early modernist writers (Wilson also calls them 'symbolists') it meant an awareness of the event-character of reality - outward reality as well as personal experience. In the essay on Proust he writes:

[T]he defence by such a philosopher as Whitehead of the metaphysics of the Romantics should apply - and it should apply a fortiori - to the metaphysics of the symbolists. . . . [I]n Proust's world, just as the alleys of the Bois de Bologne which the hero had seen in his youth under the influence of the beauty of Odette have now changed into something quite different and are irrecoverable *as the moment of time in which they had had their only existence* - just as his people, in spite of the logic of the processes by which they change, are always changing and will finally fade away, disintegrated by illness or old age; so love, of which we hope so much, changes and fails us, and so society, which at first seems so stable, in a few years has recombined its groups and merged and transformed its classes. And, as in the universe of Whitehead, the 'events', which may be taken arbitrarily as infinitely small or infinitely comprehensive, make up an organic structure, in which all are interdependent, each involving every other and the whole; so Proust's book is a gigantic dense mesh of complicated relations. (Wilson 1931, p. 130; my emphasis)

And again in the essay on Joyce, with an even more direct reference to the themes of abstraction and common experience mentioned above:

Joyce is indeed really the great poet of a new phase of the human consciousness. Like Proust's, or Whitehead's or Einstein's world, Joyce's world is always changing as it is perceived by different observers and by them at different times. It is an organism made up of 'events', which may be taken as infinitely inclusive or infinitely small and each of which involves all the others; and each of these events is unique. Such a world cannot be presented in terms of such artificial abstractions as have been conventional in the past: Solid institutions, groups, individuals which play the parts of distinct durable entities - or even of solid psychological factors: dualisms of good and evil, mind and matter, flesh and spirit, instinct and reason; clear conflicts between passion and duty, between conscience and interest. Not that these conceptions are left out of Joyce's world: they are all there in the minds of the characters; and the realities they represent are there, too. But everything is reduced to terms of 'events' like those of modern physics and philosophy - events which make up a 'continuum', but which may be taken as infinitely small. (*op. cit.*, p. 177f.)

It is important to note that these 'relativists' are not reducing reality to subjective experience, leaving an unknown and unknowable *noumenon*, a brooding absence, so to speak, behind. Rather, they think that concrete reality, when attended to carefully enough, reveals itself as an 'eventual' unity in experience, where each 'event' is nothing but the world itself as it is in that moment of experience; the 'moment', in turn can be picked from a continuous spectrum ranging from the infinitesimal to the infinite. What is really real comes into existence, perishes and in its perishing gives rise to another occasion of existence, continuously, but it is not confined to one side of the subject-object distinction. In fact, that distinction is overcome in the concept of 'event', in which all things are together and present *in* each other. It remains as the distinction between past and present, where the past is devoid of subjective agency and is objectified for the present, which realizes itself for itself as a novel togetherness of the objectified occasions. The past is public, the presently concurring event is private; it is all the 'inside' there is.<sup>262</sup> That is what experience, as opposed to abstraction, ultimately is: the being present *in* one another of actually existing entities. With that basic conceptual move thought has received a new grounding, one from which it is possible to give all oppositions there due without falling into misplaced concreteness.

While Wilson was working on *Axel's Castle*, he was also working on a novel about his feelings for the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. The novel, *I Thought of Daisy*, was published two years before *Axel's Castle*, in 1929. In it, Whitehead is present in the form of a professor Grosbeake. Here, too, Whitehead occupies a central place in the plot. The protagonist at first approaches Daisy from out of abstract conceptions about the world, about love and about Daisy herself, and, naturally, doesn't get anywhere in his attempts to interest her in himself. It is only after an evening with Grosbeake, where he learns that aesthetic values which can make a poet declare that the 'pavements of the Village are harsh, and the sound of the river is musical' are as

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<sup>262</sup> Although, like the subject-object distinction, this distinction is not fundamental. Every prehension, that is every concrete fact of relatedness that makes up occasions has its public side in the prehended object and its private side in the way in which the object is taken up into the self-constitution of the occasion. But the prehension isn't anymore on the object side than on the side of the occasion. Prehension means that the public is within the private, hence there isn't such a thing as pure privacy (PR 212).

much part or reality itself as the qualities and forms science informs us about, that life comes back to him.

It is winter. When he leaves Grosbeake's house in the night, he 'fe[els] a delicious delicacy of iciness, glossy fall-leaf silvers and black rain-glinting glass'.<sup>263</sup> The speculative analysis of what concrete reality is has brought life in its full gamut and complexity of quality and manner back to him. He is now able to approach Daisy without preconceived opinions; he can let things happen, he can let her be who she is, and he can let his feelings be what they are, without reducing them to something which they are not, to 'nothing but' instances of a partial explanatory scheme. In terms of our conceptuality: he has found his way back to concrete experience. Towards the end of the chapter, he is standing with Daisy on the railway station from which he is leaving.

There were some country people standing about, and I was a little shy of kissing her good-bye; but we kissed, as I was getting on the train: I touched her coral lips for an instant. It was deliciously cold, moist and light, like that moment of ice and winter flowers inside the glass of Grosbeake's porch.<sup>264</sup>

The kiss, the prehensive unification, the being present in another, so impossible to express in ordinary language, is what concrete experience is. In Wilson's use and treatment of Whitehead's speculative philosophy we learn that the highest generality speaks to what is most individual, that metaphysics brings the mind back to concrete experience. In that sense metaphysics underlies the romantic movement and the modernist movement, both illustrations of that general fact.

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<sup>263</sup> Wilson 1929, p. 245.

<sup>264</sup> Wilson 1929, p. 270.

## Appendix: A Concise Chronology of A. N. Whitehead's

### Life and Works

- 1861 Born on 15 February at Ramsgate, Kent, as son of Alfred Whitehead and Maria Sarah Whitehead, born Buckmaster. Whitehead's father was head of a private school in Ramsgate before becoming a clergyman of the Anglican Church in 1860.
- 1875 Sent to Sherborne in Dorsetshire, where Whitehead is a successful pupil and is allowed to spend extra time studying mathematics, a subject for which he shows great talent.
- 1880 Enters Trinity College, where he studies mathematics. Whitehead remains a fellow of Trinity until 1910.
- 1885 Acquires the fellowship at Trinity, with a teaching position, leading eventually to the position of Senior Lecturer.
- 1890 Marries Evelyn Willoughby Wade.
- 1891 Son Thomas North born.
- 1893 Daughter Jessie Marie born.
- 1898 Son Eric Alfred born; Whitehead publishes *A Treatise on Universal Algebra*. Politically active until the departure for London.
- 1900 Visits, with his pupil Bertrand Russell, the first International Congress of Philosophy in Paris where he meets Peano.
- 1903 Abandons his plans for a second volume of *Universal Algebra*, on which he had been working since 1898, as does Russell his plans for a sequel to *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903). They decide to cooperate on a work, which was to take no more than a year. This work eventually became the *Principia Mathematica*, published between 1910 and 1913. Elected a member of the Royal Society.
- 1910 Resigns his position as Senior Lecturer in Cambridge and moves to London, where he spends a year without an academic position. Writes the *Introduction to Mathematics* (1911).

- 1911 Appointed professor in applied mathematics at University College, and (in 1914) at the Imperial College of Science and Technology. Serves on a number of educational committees, and is subsequently senator (1919) and dean (1921) of the faculty of science of London University. Writes a number of essays on education, published as *The Organisation of Thought* (1917) and *The Aims of Education* (1929).
- 1919 *The Principles of Natural Knowledge*. Gives the first Tarner Lectures in Trinity College, published in 1920 as *The Concept of Nature*.
- 1922 Publishes *The Principle of Relativity with Applications to Physical Science*.
- 1924 Accepts an invitation to join the philosophy department of Harvard University as professor of philosophy.
- 1925-1926 Lowell lecturer twice. The two series of lectures published as *Science and the Modern World* and *Religion in the Making*.
- 1927 *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (the Barbour-Page lectures in the University of Virginia).
- 1927-1928 Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh; these are published the year after as *Process and Reality*.
- 1929 Louis Clark Vanuxem lecturer (Princeton); the lectures are published the same year under the title *The Function of Reason*.
- 1933 *Adventures of Ideas*. Lectures in Chicago. These lectures are published as *Nature and Life* (1934), later in *Modes of Thought* (1938).
- 1937 Emeritus; continues to live in Harvard and plays an active part in the philosophical community. (In 1954 Lucien Price publishes a collection of dialogues of Whitehead, recording some of the conversations Whitehead had with Price and others during his Harvard years.)
- 1937-1938 Lectures at Wellesley College; these lectures are published as *Modes of Thought*.
- 1939 Lectures in Harvard on 'Mathematics and the Good'.



1941 Ingersoll Lecture, Harvard Divinity School, titled 'Immortality'. The 1939 and 1941 lectures are published in the Whitehead volume of *The Library of Living Philosophers* (1941).

1945 Whitehead is awarded the Order of Merit.

1947 Dies 30 December in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the collection of essays *Essays on Science and Philosophy* is published.

(I have relied on the 'Autobiographical Notes', published in Schilpp 1941, 1951 and on Lowe 1985 and 1990.)

## Bibliography

In both parts A and B of the bibliography, only works we refer to in the text are listed. In part A the reader will find first a list of the abbreviations used for reference; below that the full bibliographical information of the works of Whitehead we have quoted or referred to is given. Here we have chosen for the following format: first, we give the first edition of the work; then we give the edition we have used, but we list only those parts of the bibliographical record of the editions we have used that differ from the first edition. There is no standard edition of the philosophical works of Whitehead (yet), but we have mainly used those editions that are most commonly used in the literature on Whitehead. In part B of the bibliography other literature we have quoted or referred to is listed.

For a complete bibliography of Whitehead's writings, we may refer to the *Bibliography of the Writings of Alfred North Whitehead*, compiled by Lowe and Baldwin, in Schilpp 1941, 1951, pp. 745-778. Occasional but slight additions to this list can be found in the *Primary/Secondary Bibliography of A.N. Whitehead*, published by the Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1977. This work also gives a complete listing of the secondary literature, but only until 1977. No adequate bibliographical record exists for the secondary literature written between 1977 and 1998; here one best consults the volumes of *Process Studies*, published by the Center for Process Studies, Claremont, California.

### A. Works by Whitehead

AE *The Aims of Education* (1929)

AI *Adventures of Ideas* (1933)

CN *The Concept of Nature* (1920)

ESP *Essays in Science and Philosophy* (1947)

FR *The Function of Reason* (1929)

MT *Modes of Thought* (1938)

- PNK *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919)
- PoR *The Principle of Relativity* (1922)
- PR *Process and Reality* (1929)
- RM *Religion in the Making* (1926)
- S *Symbolism* (1927)
- SMW *Science and the Modern World* (1925)
- UAA *Treatise on Universal Algebra* (1898)
- 1898
- A Treatise on Universal Algebra. With Applications. Vol. I.*  
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## Samenvatting

*De methode van de speculatieve filosofie - een essay over de grondslagen van Whiteheads metafysica*

In deze studie staat de vraag centraal naar de status en aard van de zogenaamde 'speculatieve filosofie', zoals begrepen door A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947). In Whiteheads speculatieve filosofie staat de gedachte centraal dat het concrete bestaan van de dingen gelegen is in, wat hij noemt, hun 'occasions-karakter'. (Een mogelijke vertaling van het woord 'occasion' zou kunnen zijn: gelegenheid of gebeurtenis). De vraag die in deze studie behandeld wordt is wat inhoud en status van een dergelijke gedachte zijn. Hierbij spelen twee aandachtspunten een grote rol: ten eerste wordt onderzocht - tegen de impliciete achtergrond van de in de twintigste eeuwse uitgewerkte metafysica-kritiek - hoe Whitehead een methode van speculatief denken heeft ontwikkeld die genoemde kritiek met recht en reden van repliek kan dienen; ten tweede wordt nagegaan wat de reikwijdte van Whiteheads uitleg van het concrete bestaan van de dingen als 'occasion', wil zeggen als gebeurtenis, is. 'Occasion' is de concrete, gesitueerde overgang van veelheid naar eenheid (en als zodanig Whiteheads antwoord op de vraag naar de verhouding van veelheid en eenheid), een passage die slechts kan bestaan voorzover ze voorlopig is en aangelegd op haar eigen verdwijnen, haar *perishing*, waarna er opnieuw occasions zijn. Het proefschrift behelst een uitleg van deze gedachte.

In de inleiding worden de grondtrekken van Whiteheads filosofie besproken. Achtereenvolgens worden het ervaringsbegrip, de verhouding tussen wetenschap en wijsbegeerte, de voorlopige aard van het speculatieve denken, en het passage-karakter van de werkelijkheid geïntroduceerd.

Whitehead omschrijft ervaring als betrokkenheid. De systematiek van zijn wijsbegeerte is erop gericht deze betrokkenheid als een daadwerkelijk in-elkaar-zijn van ervaring en ervaarde te denken. Op deze wijze tracht hij de metafysische dualismen die de moderne wijsbegeerte kenmerken te overwinnen. Centraal inzicht is dat het in-elkaar-zijn, kenmerkend voor de ervaring, een temporele structuur heeft. De 'occasion' is wezenlijk een gebeuren, ingeschakeld in een passage van

occasion naar occasion. Tegelijk maakt ervaring het gehele concrete bestaan van de dingen uit; met andere woorden: buiten de ervaringsact om is het concrete zijnde niets, en buiten de ervaringsacten om is er niet nog iets anders (dit is Whiteheads 'ontologisch beginsel').

De analyse van het concrete bestaan (de 'existentie') van de dingen biedt nu de mogelijkheid wetenschap en wijsbegeerte als op elkaar betrokken, maar in tegengestelde richting zich ontwikkelend, te begrijpen. Waar de wetenschap gericht is op het vaststellen van verbanden tussen deelaspecten - abstracties - van het concrete zijnde, is de speculatieve filosofie erop gericht het concrete zijnde als zodanig ter sprake te brengen. Dit brengt met zich mee dat een in abstracte begrippen opererende metafysica nimmer kan voldoen. Het doel van de metafysica is veeleer te laten zien (Whitehead spreekt hier van het '*exhibitive*' karakter van de wijsbegeerte, tegenover het '*explanatory*' karakter van de wetenschap) hoe het concrete zijnde abstracte, universele factoren als deel van de eigen bepaaldheid in zich draagt, zonder ermee samen te vallen. Het concrete zijnde is altijd meer dan zijn vormen. De consequenties die dit heeft voor de methode van de speculatieve filosofie komen in hoofdstuk twee uitgebreid aan bod.

De intrinsiek temporele structuur van de werkelijkheid wordt tenslotte uitgewerkt naar haar gevolgen voor het filosofisch denken zelf, dat ook wezenlijk temporeel of in beweging is voor zover het tracht werkelijk concreet te zijn, en naar de implicatie dat nieuwheid (*novelty*), naast het ervaringskarakter, een intrinsieke factor van het concrete zijnde als zodanig is.

Hoofdstuk één is gewijd aan een nadere beschouwing van de ervaringsact, en een nadere beschouwing van de wijsgerige methode. Op deze wijze tracht ik in dit eerste hoofdstuk de tweedeling tussen inhoud en vorm van Whiteheads filosofie te verhelderen, om die dan vervolgens in de rest van de studie zodanig te interpreteren dat hun samenhang duidelijk wordt.

Ervaring is voor Whitehead altijd een actualisatie. Omdat het zijnde niets is buiten 'ervaring' om, en ervaring temporeel is, is actualiteit *actualisatie*. Met andere woorden: de act, die de ervaring is, behoeft geen vooraf gegeven actor. Deze gedachte, van de act zonder actor, noem ik Whiteheads moeilijkste gedachte. Voor



Whitehead realiseert het actuele zijnde zichzelf als zodanig in de act van zelf-realisatie, en *is* het dit zichzelf-realiseren. Het einde van de wordingsact is het einde van het zijnde als voor-zichzelf bestaand; vervolgens blijft het een rol spelen (door Whitehead 'objectief' genoemd) als deel van het verleden van zijn opvolgers.

Whitehead wijst de subject-predicaat structuur, en daarmee de substantie-accident ontologie, af als adequate denkfiguren voor een metafysische analyse. Het concrete zijnde (de 'occasion') is niet zozeer een substantieel zijnde, gekenmerkt doordat het gevormd is door een essentie en bepaalde accidentele eigenschappen; het concrete zijnde *laat* algemene bepalingen *zien* als deel van wat het is, zonder er mee samen te vallen. Deze formulering van Whitehead moet, en kan alleen maar begrepen worden tegen de achtergrond van wat hij ziet als de taak van de speculatieve filosofie: het ontwikkelen van een schema van *ideas* of *notions* waarmee het geheel van de ervaring geïnterpreteerd kan worden. In een dergelijk speculatief schema zijn de verschillende noties alle fundamenteel - wat wil zeggen dat ze niet gedefiniëerd kunnen worden in termen van dieperliggende noties, maar alleen maar verhelderd kunnen worden in hun wederzijdse en wezenlijke afhankelijkheid. Het speculatieve denken beweegt zich in een verstaanscirkel.

Voor de verhouding tussen het concrete zijnde en de algemene kenmerken betekent dit dat een interpretatie van Whitehead als uitgangspunt zal moeten nemen dat de karakterisering van deze verhouding als een *laten zien* (*exhibition*) niet gereduceerd kan worden tot gangbare voorstellingen omtrent de aard van universalia. Tevens betekent het, dat de speculatieve analyse zelf, voorzover zij een algemeen schema van ideeën geeft, evenzeer een vorm van *laten zien*, van *exhibition*, is - en niet van attributie of van reductie tot oorzaken. Voor Whitehead staan categorialiteit en het gecategoriseerde in deze verhouding van *exhibition*, die daarmee enerzijds centraal bestanddeel is van Whiteheads ontologie en anderzijds de criteria aangeeft waaraan een uitleg van deze filosofie zich gehouden weet. Het is zeer zeker het geval dat Whitehead de interpretator hiermee een moeilijke opgave stelt; toch kan die opgave niet uit de weg worden gegaan. Doet men dat wel, dan verschijnen zijn teksten als een vorm van reductionisme, waarin de wereld zoals die aan ons verschijnt teruggevoerd wordt op een 'eigenlijke' wereld, bestaande uit minutieuze gebeurtenissen die, hoewel onwaarneembaar, de ervaren wereld

schragen. Deze lezing vinden we terug in een groot deel van de literatuur over Whitehead, maar in deze studie wordt aangegeven waarom die tekort schiet en de waarde van Whiteheads filosofie onzichtbaar maakt. We stellen haar verantwoordelijk voor het gangbare beeld van Whiteheads filosofie als een naïeve, pre-kritische vorm van metafysica.

In het tweede hoofdstuk staat de methode centraal. We gaan in op de betekenis van het systematische karakter van Whiteheads speculatieve filosofie, en laten zien wat de draagwijdte van het begrip *coherence* (d.i. de wederzijdse afhankelijkheid van basale noties) is.

In dit hoofdstuk wordt het zogenaamde 'ontologisch beginsel', de gedachte dat er buiten de concrete *occasions* om niets is, geïdentificeerd als het brandpunt van Whiteheads filosofie. We laten zien hoe de verhouding tussen de ideeën van het schema, net als die tussen de *occasions*, er een is van expressie, en we laten zien hoe expressie begrepen moet worden in termen van Whiteheads begrip *togetherness*. De occasion *is* het samenzijn van anderen in een nieuwe eenheid, maar 'zijn' zoals hier gebruikt mag niet attributief of copulatief worden verstaan. De eigen aard van het speculatieve denken maakt het noodzakelijk hier een transitief gebruik van 'zijn' te lezen. De verhouding tussen eenheid en veelheid, een cruciaal thema van de overgeleverde metafysica, wordt door Whitehead begrepen als het steeds concrete samengaan, op de wijze van de expressie, van het vele in het nieuwe ene, een samengaan dat het karakter van een passage heeft en alleen maar bestaat in - of eigenlijk: als - een concrete, historische, gesitueerdheid. Eenheid en veelheid worden daarmee vanuit de gebeurtenis gedacht, en zijn een voorbeeld van coherentie, zoals Whitehead dit begrip gebruikt.

Vervolgens worden enige opmerkingen gemaakt over de verhouding tussen het speculatieve begrip van *occasions* en de ontologische differentie. In een slotparagraaf komt een probleem naar voren: eerst stellen we vast dat het speculatieve gebruik van expressie leidt tot de affirmatie van een bepaalde vorm van de gedachte van de eenheid van tegendelen, in deze filosofie aangeduid met de term '*the total metaphysical situation*'. In Whiteheads filosofie moet het centrale begrip *process* tegen de achtergrond van deze gedachte begrepen worden. Op basis van de methodologie van de speculatieve metafysica zoals uiteengezet in dit hoofdstuk, moeten we echter

concluderen dat het procesbegrip zelf - en daarmee de notie van de totale metafysische situatie - niet goed gearticuleerd kan worden. Het concrete zijnde is altijd méér dan de vormen die het laat zien; het laten-zien is, gedacht als expressie, de grondstructuur van het concrete zijnde en de eenheid van het concrete zijnde. Het is tevens de grond van intelligibiliteit. Maar de eenheid van het concrete zijnde, de vormen die het laat zien en de grondverhouding van expressie kan zelf niet adequaat begrepen worden omdat het geen *peers* heeft in termen waarvan het uitgedrukt kan worden. Hier treffen we een grens aan die het speculatieve denken niet met behoud van zinvolheid lijkt te kunnen overschrijden.

Het derde hoofdstuk zet de interpretatie voort met een analyse van de *occasion*. Het ontologisch beginsel brengt met zich mee dat de sfeer van de categorialiteit geen eigenstandigheid heeft tegenover de sfeer van de concrete existentie. Met andere woorden, Whiteheads filosofie kan niet begrepen worden als een vorm van essentialistische metafysica, die probeert de onveranderlijke vorm aan te geven waar het concrete bestaan zich naar voegt. In een beschouwing van een recente studie van N. Rescher over procesmetafysica, waar we een 'essentialistische' weergave van het procesdenken vinden, en in een beschouwing van de thomistische leer van de *actus essendi*, zoals weergegeven door P. Geach (waar we een begrip van *zijn* vinden dat gemodelleerd is naar het vormbegrip als een *quo*, een waardoor), laten we zien wat het verschil is tussen deze twee vormen van overgeleverde metafysica en Whiteheads speculatieve gebeurtenisfilosofie, en waarom we menen dat Whiteheads filosofie hier de betere is.

Deze bespreking dient ter verheldering van het occasions-begrip, zodat in het tweede deel van hoofdstuk 3 (vanaf 3.5) de reikwijdte ervan onderzocht kan worden. We bespreken achtereenvolgens, in een verdiepende herneming van de in de inleiding reeds genoemde thema's, het ervaringsbegrip, de temporaliteit van de *occasion*, en de wijze waarop Whiteheads 'occasionalisme' een herinterpretatie van de metafysische oppositie schijn-werkelijkheid met zich meebrengt, waarin uiteindelijk zijn verhouding tot de overgeleverde metafysica, en de vernieuwing die zijn denken betekent, het best tot uitdrukking komen.

Hoofdstuk vier bevat een recapitulatie van de afgelegde weg in het licht van een nadere beschouwing van de verhouding tussen speculatief denken en de alledaagse

ervaring. Speculatief denken, zo geven we aan, dient allereerst begrepen te worden in relatie tot de alledaagse ervaring, en pas daarna in relatie tot andere vormen van ervaring, bijvoorbeeld de wetenschappelijke. Met de verhouding tussen filosofie en alledaagse ervaring bereiken we de conclusie van deze studie. Het appendix over Whitehead en Edmund Wilson behandelt, bij wijze van illustratie, hetzelfde onderwerp als hoofdstuk vier, maar nu aan de hand van een concreet voorbeeld: het gebruik dat criticus en schrijver Wilson gemaakt heeft van centrale gedachten van Whitehead.