

Process Thought and Roman Catholicism

Challenges and Promises

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Chapter 8

Whitehead on Incarnation and the Co-Inherence of God and the World

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“The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself.”¹ This is how Whitehead introduces the concept of incarnation in his work. His use of the term may be traced back to early Christian theology where, as he sees it, the concept signifies an important metaphysical improvement of Plato’s view of the relation between God and the world. For Whitehead, the only way to explain the persuasiveness and effectiveness of the divine ideals in the world is through the notion of incarnation and its connotations of immanence and participation. In this chapter, we will trace the backgrounds of these ideas in Plato and the early Christian theologians, and analyze how Whitehead used the ideas of incarnation and (mutual) immanence to develop his anti-nominalistic organic metaphysics, which he deems necessary for several reasons, including scientific ones. In the concluding section, we will reflect on Whitehead’s approach in the perspective of Catholic thought, and one of the observations will be that Whitehead’s strongly anti-nominalistic ideas make him more congenial to the Aquinas-informed Catholic tradition than often is recognized.

WHITEHEAD’S SEARCH FOR DIVINE PERSUASION AND IMMANENCE

In his theological chapter of *Adventures of Ideas* (“The New Reformation”), Whitehead points out three revelatory phases in the conceptions of how God and God’s Ideas can be persuasive elements in the world, so that Ideas are effective and forms of order evolve. The middle one he refers to is the life of Christ seen as a revelation of the noncoercive nature of God’s agency in the world.² Before and after this event, Whitehead discerns two intellectual

phases: first, the conviction of Plato concerning the persuasive way of divine agency, and second, the theological interpretation of the Christ event generated in the formative period of Christianity.³ What is it that makes Whitehead consider these intellectual phases to be revelatory?

Plato

In his metaphysical explorations, Whitehead aligns himself in many respects with the thoughts and questions brought forward by Plato. When he studies Plato with regard to the conception of the divine agency as persuasive or as compulsive, Whitehead ascertains that Plato wavered inconsistently, but that he “does finally enunciate without qualification the doctrine of persuasion.”⁴ Whitehead considers this “final conviction”⁵ of Plato which he summarizes as “the divine element in the world is to be conceived as a persuasive agency and not as a coercive agency” in an extremely positive way, so much so that he characterizes Plato’s view as “one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the philosophy of religion.”⁶

The reason why Whitehead so greatly appreciates this view is that, according to him, the doctrine of divine *persuasion* provides the key to the view that the divine ideals are *effective* in the world and allowing for the evolution of forms of order.⁷ He considers this as an enormous improvement of the alternative view that the world would be ready-made “out of nothing” as the accidental product of a totally transcendent God, which, according to Whitehead, is the view proposed by the Bible and by Newton.⁸

However, even though Plato (more or less clearly) opts for the view of creation as the victory of persuasion over force,⁹ Whitehead argues that Plato fails to explain how the Ideas can be present in the world in order to fulfill their persuasive role, and therefore fails to give a coherent and systematic explanation of the effective link between the Ideas (or Forms) and the evolving transient reality.¹⁰

Whitehead’s major objection pertains to Plato’s indecisive interpretation of the relationship between the eternal divine Ideas and their instantiations in the sensible, particular phenomena. In his *Dialogues*, Plato presents several expressions of that relationship between “form” and “particular.” Generally speaking, these expressions can be divided into two main clusters, which respectively can be characterized as *mimesis* (duplication, mimicry, or imitation) and *methexis* (participation, sharing) (a term Plato newly introduces into the philosophical terminology).

Whitehead clearly favors Plato’s concept of *methexis* (participation, sharing) —to be found in his *Phaedo*¹¹—because, so he argues, this notion is the only key to the doctrine of persuasiveness. Taking for granted the standard

opinion that the *Timaeus* is a late dialogue, Whitehead deplores that Plato did not maintain this concept of participation in his *Timaeus*. In the *Timaeus*, Plato invariably sees the relationship between the Ideas and their instantiation in terms of “dramatic imitation,” while insisting that divine creation occurs through persuasion.¹² It is this combination of imitation and persuasiveness that for Whitehead is simply impossible:

When Plato turns to the World, after considering God as giving life and motion to the ideas by the inclusion of them in the divine nature, he can find only second-rate substitutes and never the originals. . . . Thus the World, for Plato, includes only the image of God, and imitations of his ideas, and never God and his ideas.¹³

Therefore, according to Whitehead, Plato cannot explain how the divine Ideas can be persuasive and effective in the world, for he leaves a gap between the transient world and the eternal nature of God.¹⁴ So Plato misses an adequate concept to explain a real immanence of God and God’s Ideas in the world.¹⁵ This is exactly the concept Whitehead wants to elaborate in his metaphysics.

Early Christian Theologians

At this point, Whitehead turns to the early Christian theologians of the schools of thought mainly associated with Alexandria and Antioch.¹⁶ The theologians of Alexandria (one of them being Athanasius [fourth century] who coined the term “incarnation”) emphasized the divine character of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the theologians of Antioch preferred a historical and moral interpretation and defended more of a distinction between God and Jesus. Next to them the School of Cappadocia (fourth century) should be mentioned, which tried to maintain a balance between those two approaches.

These early theologians tried to find theological answers to the questions pertaining to the relation between Jesus Christ (and the Spirit) and God the Father, as well as to the questions pertaining to the relation between the divine and the human natures within Christ. After considerable debates, they came at the Councils of Nicaea I (325) and Constantinople I (381) to insights and formulations such as that Jesus Christ is *homoousios* (of same substance or essence) as the Father, and that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for us humans and our salvation was “enfleshed” (*incarnatus est*) and made human (*humanatus est*). The Trinitarian controversies on the relation between Father, Son, and Spirit were settled, mainly under the influence of the Cappadocian Fathers, in the famous formulation “One *ousia* (being/

substance/essence) in three *hypostaseis* (persons)” (Constantinople I). The Christological debate resulted at the Council of Chalcedon (451) in the confession that Jesus Christ is “to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably.*”

Whitehead summarizes these complex theological conclusions as follows:

[These theologians came to the] solution of a multiplicity in the nature of God, each component being unqualifiedly Divine, [which] involves a doctrine of mutual immanence in the divine nature. . . . They decided for the direct immanence of God in the person of Christ. They also decided for some sort of direct immanence of God in the World generally. This was their doctrine of the third person of the Trinity.¹⁷

Here we may add that, while the doctrine of the direct immanence of God in Christ is known as *incarnation*, the doctrine of the mutual immanence in God, that is, the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit, goes by the lesser-known name *perichoresis* or *co-inherence*.

Whitehead’s enthusiasm for these early theologians pertains primarily to the fact that “in the place of Plato’s solution of secondary images and imitations, they demanded a direct doctrine of immanence.”¹⁸ And for Whitehead, this concept of immanence is precisely the concept that provides the solution to the question of how to give a rational account of the persuasive agency of God.¹⁹ That is why Whitehead considers the solution given by those theologians as a crucial discovery for metaphysics: “[They] have the distinction of being the only thinkers who in a fundamental, metaphysical doctrine have improved upon Plato.”²⁰

However, so Whitehead points out, having developed their notion of direct immanence in a theological context, these theologians unfortunately failed to make use of this discovery for a further development of a general metaphysics. This is the task Whitehead sets for himself. He is not interested in the theological doctrines as such, but all the more in a rationally developed doctrine of direct immanence of God in the world.

WHITEHEAD ON IMMANENCE AND MUTUAL IMMANENCE

So far, we saw that in his search for a concept that might bridge the gap between God or God’s Ideas and the transient world, Whitehead considers the concept of immanence (as understood by the early Christian theologians) to be a crucial metaphysical discovery which enables him, as will be shown, to conceptualize the Platonic doctrine of the *persuasive presence of the ideal*

in the actual world.

Moreover, this concept of immanence enables him to elucidate his general metaphysical view that all reality is inherently relational. As he sees it, no actual entity²¹—God included—stands alone, separate from the other actual entities, but each is a constituent in the constitution of the others.²² Whitehead develops “immanence” in terms of his notion of prehension (or feeling or absorption): by being prehended, an actual entity becomes immanent in the prehending one. So Whitehead speaks of the “immanence of the past in the present” (by inheritance or reenaction) but also in a slightly different sense of the “immanence of the future in the present” (by anticipation) and even of contemporary occasions in each other (only indirectly, since they are by definition causally independent).²³ By prehending and being prehended, actual entities are interwoven in a web of relations.

From 1932 on (in his lecture entitled “Process and Reality”), Whitehead uses the term *mutual immanence* to signify this specific togetherness: “The key to metaphysics is this doctrine of mutual immanence, each side lending to the other a factor necessary for its reality.”²⁴ In this way Whitehead conceptualizes and expresses his “fundamental thesis . . . that the final actualities of the universe cannot be abstracted from one another because each actuality, though individual and discrete, is internally related to all other actualities,” as Nobo aptly phrases.²⁵ In the same lecture, Whitehead also explicitly uses this expression in the context of the mutual immanence of permanence and transience, and of God and the world.²⁶

In *Process and Reality* (1929), Whitehead did not yet use the expression “mutual immanence,” but he did express similar insights as follows: “[N]o two actual entities can be torn apart: each is all in all.” He continues, “Thus each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God.”²⁷ The phrase “each occasion embodies God” brings us to the subject of “incarnation.”

INCARNATION OF GOD IN THE WORLD

Immanence and Incarnation

How does immanence relate to incarnation? In its strictest theological sense, the term “incarnation” refers to God’s direct immanence in Jesus Christ. The Gospel according to St. John proclaims, “The Word became flesh (*sarx*),” and of this Word it states, “The Word was with God and the Word was God.”²⁸

The meaning of the provocative proclamation that God became flesh has been the subject of intense theological debates, with ramifications for soteriology,

and for questions concerning the place of matter in relation to evil, to which we will return shortly.

As stated earlier, Whitehead values the theological doctrine of incarnation, that is, of the direct immanence of God in the person of Christ, as a discovery with a huge *metaphysical* significance that he wants to further develop in his philosophy. Thus, he speaks of the incarnation or embodiment of God in each temporal occasion²⁹ and writes the intriguing phrase “[t]he world lives by its incarnation of God in itself.”³⁰ We have now to consider in some more detail how Whitehead conceptualizes in his metaphysics this immanence or embodiment of God in the world, and especially how it relates to persuasiveness and effectiveness.

Incarnation and Persuasiveness: *Eros*

Whitehead’s starting point is, what is “really real” must be understood as a process, that is, as an organism. Accordingly, he sees each actual entity as a *process that realizes itself* out of the available material.³¹ Whitehead tries to lay out the conditions of the possibility thereof. First, there must be *past events* that are the material from which the novel event forms itself. But since a multitude of materials can be synthesized in many different ways—the one more beautiful than the other—also a limitation by some *standard of value* is required. In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead therefore introduces “in the metaphysical situation” a “principle of limitation,” which he calls “God.”³² Later on, he will call this more precisely the primordial and abstract aspect of God.³³ In prehending this divine primordial nature, a new event “feels” the most valuable possibility for synthesis of its given past events as its own desire, its initial subjective aim.³⁴ In this way, God’s immutable primordial nature functions as “object of desire.” But, immutable though it may be, this divine primordial nature shows itself differently for each and every event. Therefore, God always embodies “a dominant ideal peculiar to each actual entity,” which means that God embodies the most attractive possibility of synthesis *relative to each particular givenness*.³⁵

Whitehead repeatedly emphasizes that the possibilities offered are not neutral or indifferent: they are working, inciting, luring, because God’s relative valuation endows them with attractiveness.³⁶ Whereas Plato sees the Demiurge as giving “life and motion” to the Ideas, Whitehead in a similar way tells us that in God’s primordial nature the Ideas (eternal objects) are felt so as to become attractive and motivating, and therefore (contrary to the *Timaeus*) persuasive. In this way, the occasion’s initial aim is the immanence of God in that occasion: “God’s immanence in the world in respect to his primordial nature is an urge towards the future based on an appetite in the

present.”³⁷

Here it should be noted that God as “object of desire” is not an impassive object, for it is God’s own active longing (the “Divine Eros”) that arouses *the attuned longing* or “conformal feeling” of the occasion (like the resonance of a string on a musical instrument).³⁸ This “co-longing” constitutes the initial subjective aim of the becoming novel occasion which is thereby originated.³⁹ In this way, Whitehead conceives the divine immanence or the incarnation of God’s Ideas in the world as well as their persuasiveness.

Incarnation and Effectiveness: (Self-)Creation

The new occasion originates by its reception of its particular initial aim. So, God’s provision of the initial subjective aim is at the same time the “creation” or “origination” of the new actual occasion. However, this “creation” relates to the *beginning of the self-creation* of the new autonomous actual occasion, for it is the point from which the subject’s self-causation starts.⁴⁰

One of the consequences of this view is that, although the incarnation of God in the world is a purposive and constitutive *lure*, God also indirectly incarnates in the *facts*, that is, in the results and the outcome of the worldly events: “Every event on its finer side introduces God into the world. Through it [God’s] ideal vision is given a base in actual fact.”⁴¹

Thus, God is embodied not merely in value and purpose but also in the facts themselves. Or, to put it differently, to some extent, a fact is not simply something different from value, but it is also the “frozen” result (*factum*) of an earlier *realization of value*, so that in some sense the factual world may be seen as the incarnation of God.

Incarnation and Evil

If, according to Whitehead, the factual world is in some sense the incarnation of God, the question arises how to explain the existence of evil. The question of evil was often connected to a theological judgment about “matter” (out of which things are made, or in Whiteheadian language “out of which new events make themselves”). From the beginning of Christianity, theologians focused on the question whether “matter” should be regarded as a second force apart from and opposed to God. Or phrased differently, they asked the question whether matter explains why there is evil in the world (a vision defended by Marcion [ca. 85–ca. 160] and the later Manichaeism [ca. third–seventh century], and strongly rejected by Tertullian [ca. 155–ca. 225] and Augustine [354–430]).

What is Whitehead’s position on this subject? For him, the given facts out

of which a new event creates itself constitute “its Actual World,” and in this sense this “Actual World” is synonymous with “matter” for the new event. This “matter” is not a factor independent from God nor a force against God, for, as described above, each “factum” is created by itself as well as by God’s lure and thus manifests to some extent the incarnation of God in itself.

How then does evil creep in? God’s creative activity in the past toward the then becoming entity which (in the meantime) has become fact or matter was at that earlier time (only) an initiation or origination in need of the subject’s subsequent self-creation for the sake of actualization. And, depending on how this self-creation occurred, the result is more or less in conformity to God’s ideal: “Every act leaves the world with a deeper or a fainter impress of God. He then passes into his next relation to the world with enlarged, or diminished, presentation of ideal values.”⁴² And “so far as the conformity is incomplete, there is evil in the world.”⁴³ The conformity *can* be incomplete, since—among other aspects—in addition to the divinely given desire, also the actualization by the new event itself is required, with better or worse result.⁴⁴

Whitehead’s view of incarnation, according to which God is present in the world as both lure and fact, keeps him, contrary to old and modern Gnostic views, from holding a negative view on the Actual World as matter. But Whitehead’s concept of incarnation also makes him reject a harmonious optimism. God is incarnated in the world, as lure and as fact, *but not every lure or fact is equally and totally an incarnation of God*. This is basically the reason why this world, even though it embodies God in itself, is not the best of all possible worlds.⁴⁵ Incarnation does not imply an identity of God with the world.

GOD AND WORLD: MUTUAL INDWELLING (*PERICHORESIS*)

Up to now, we have seen how the notion of “incarnation” found in the Church Fathers allows Whitehead to conceptualize the vision Plato had in mind: the immanence of God’s Ideas in the world so as to make them persuasive and by the same token codetermining for the factual result.

But there is much more to be said. Unfortunately, Whitehead obviously was not familiar with the intriguing theological notion of *perichoresis*, which in the seventh or eighth century eventually received its decisive meaning of “mutual indwelling,” or “co-inherence,” namely the co-inherence of the three divine persons *in* one another “without any coalescence” in spite of their remaining “inseparable.”⁴⁶ These qualifications clearly indicate that co-inherence

is not only *mutual immanence* but *mutual transcendence* too. That is to say, each person has its own individuality, but each is who “he” is by virtue of the inner relations to the others.

When Whitehead in his metaphysical context speaks of the “mutual immanence of actual entities,” this language resembles the concept of “co-inherence:” every actual entity is individual and discrete, but no actual entity can be abstracted from the others, because—by its prehensions of all others—it is internally related to them.⁴⁷

As seen earlier, such mutual immanence applies not only between actual occasions but also between God and the world.⁴⁸ In his metaphysics, the concept of what he calls God’s consequent nature—that is, God in full concreteness—functions as the mainstay of the conceptualization of the reciprocal immanence of the world in God. Throughout the present chapter, so far we have seen that the worldly actual entities apprehend God’s primordial nature. But at the end of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead goes a fundamental step further when he argues that “God, as well as being primordial, is also consequent.”⁴⁹ This means that God not only *is* apprehended, but that “by reason of the relativity of all things” God also *prehends* all other actual entities and absorbs them into God’s concrete being. Thus the world’s ongoing history is forever known and treasured in God and woven upon God’s primordial concepts.⁵⁰ This is how Whitehead conceives God’s consequent nature. And in its turn, this “Great Fact” too has an influence on the world.⁵¹ As Fetz suitably states, “Whitehead thus acknowledges not only a participation of the world in God as Thomas has done, but also a participation of God in the world.”⁵²

But, mutual though this participation may be, and in spite of the fact that God and the actual occasions pertain to the same metaphysics (God is no exception⁵³), Whitehead sees God and the world as opposites.⁵⁴ The opposition stems from their reversed polarity: in actual occasions, the physical pole is primordial while the conceptual pole is consequent, whereas in God this order is reversed.⁵⁵ And precisely this reversed polarity explains how God and worldly occasions can apprehend each other and thereby are instruments of novelty for each other.⁵⁶

This allows Whitehead to express what may be called the “*perichoresis* of God and the world,” when he says, “It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.”⁵⁷ In conclusion, Whitehead’s philosophical approach allows him to say that “each temporal occasion embodies God” as well as that “each temporal occasion is embodied in God.”⁵⁸

PROMISES AND CHALLENGES OF WHITEHEAD IN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

At this point, it is worthwhile to determine what may be said about Whitehead's approach within the perspective of Catholic thought, here represented by Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century). In two earlier publications, I compared Aquinas and Whitehead regarding their conceptions of God's power and regarding their use of language about God, respectively.⁵⁹ Here I merely want to stress how much Whitehead's thinking is in tune with a fundamental idea of Catholic thought—the idea of participation—which Whitehead expands and dynamizes. We shall see some of its consequences and its background.

Participation and Intimacy—Aquinas

As we have seen, Whitehead developed the Platonic notion of “participation” so as to make conceivable that the divine Ideas are persuasive in the world. He did so by elaborating how God is immanent in the world and incarnates in the world as lure and as fact.

For Aquinas, who also was influenced by Aristotle and Plato, the thought of “the world's participation in God” does not occur through an enlarged concept of *incarnation*—“incarnation” to him applies exclusively to Jesus Christ—but does so by deepening the concept of *being*. In order to describe God's causality with respect to the world Aquinas makes use of the four Aristotelian “causes,” but in his account of creation, he adds a fundamentally different kind of causal relationship: God is also and above all *causa essendi*, which means the cause of the *being* of things (not just insofar they are these-beings or such-beings). Aquinas elucidates this relationship with an example of the sun as illuminator and the air becoming luminous by participating in the light of the sun. Thus, by participating in the light of the sun the air is luminous and has light, but the air is not light by its own nature, which appears all too clearly when the sun fails. Analogously, the world has no being of itself but owes its being and its remaining in existence fully to participation in God's being, that is to God's permanent “influx of *esse*.”⁶⁰

Thus, by saying that the creation of the world means participation in God (in God's Being), Aquinas introduces, on top of the Aristotelian elements, a specifically Platonic element. And in this way, Whitehead and Aquinas are very alike. According to Aquinas, the worldly being exists due to its participation in God's *esse*; according to Whitehead, the occasion exists due to its “sharing in the immanent nature of God,” whereby it participates in God's

Eros.⁶¹ So, both Aquinas and Whitehead agree on the crucial point of evolution that the existence of worldly beings fundamentally requires God's *unceasing* active presence (in marked contrast to Deism) and results from their participation therein. For both, God essentially differs from the world and transcends the world, and yet God's presence in the world is of the utmost intimacy.

However, Whitehead and Aquinas differ on one important point. For Whitehead, the participation is reciprocal: the world embodies God and God embodies the world.⁶² Whitehead accounts for this in terms of what he calls God's consequent nature. For Aquinas, this idea of reciprocity would be unthinkable because of God's unicity and singularity. And, to some degree, Whitehead goes along with Aquinas when he says that God and the world are fundamentally different to the point of being opposites. However, to him this opposition between God and the world just implies their mutual requirement.⁶³

Nominalist Rejection of Participation—Modernity and Protestantism

Both Aquinas and Whitehead were impressed by Plato's attempt to integrate the notion of participation into his thinking. Furthermore, both were obviously influenced by Aristotle. Therefore, it should be of no surprise that, despite all differences, their doctrines show some similar "color," especially on subjects such as participation, relatedness, or finality.

However, it must be noted that the thought of participation, relatedness, finality, and so on, broke down under the influence of crucial theological criticisms and changes in thinking during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Here both the work of Duns Scotus with his *voluntarism* and his doctrine of the *univocity of being* and Ockham's *nominalism* played a decisive role.

The doctrine of univocity does away with any reference to "analogy" or "participation." This implies the rejection of the doctrine of participation in being, which was so crucial to Aquinas. The doctrine of nominalism considers universals (Plato's Ideas) as mere concepts or names, and by the same token it stresses the primacy of individuals which now are seen as "bare" isolated beings not sharing common qualities by participation. Voluntarism for its part stresses the absolute will of God so much so as to declare the will of God unaccountable, so that any reference to God or God's will is duly left out of any intellectual discourse. It emphasizes God's otherness to such a degree that the world takes on an autonomy it never had before in the writings of, for instance, Augustine or Aquinas. The result is that it encourages a thinking in terms of two worlds: a chasm between nature and the supernatural, between creation and Creator, between science and faith, and an "absence of God in the world" that replaces a "sacramentality of the world."

This huge and astonishing reversal in thinking is widely considered to be a key factor in the emergence of modernity in general (the “disenchantment of the world”) and of Protestantism in particular.⁶⁴ And one of its many and complex consequences is the predominance of naturalism and empiricism, which cleared the way for the rise of modern physics and its characteristic “scientific materialism.”

In view of all this, it has to be noted that, by his elaboration of the idea of participation in terms of immanence or mutual immanence, Whitehead has come to occupy a seemingly untimely place in the history of philosophy. Indeed, his philosophical project shows from beginning to end that his thought is anything but nominalistic. In the next and final section, we will see why Whitehead resists the modern nominalistic trend and develops his “philosophy of organism” for the benefit of science, philosophy, and theology.

Beyond Realism and Nominalism – Whitehead

As mentioned earlier, nominalism involves separate individuals, aimlessness, and a strict separation between the domain of God and the domain of the world. All of these were criticized by Whitehead. Therefore, his metaphysics may be seen as one encompassing attempt to offer an alternative to nominalism.

This makes it quite understandable that Whitehead feels more at home with Plato, the counterpart of nominalism. But his appreciation of Plato never makes him blind to criticism. So, with regard to the status of eternal objects (the Platonic Ideas), Whitehead’s view is far more Aristotelian because he insists that the Ideas are not ontologically independent entities but only exist *in* their actualizations (conceptually in God, or physically in the world). Furthermore, he does not value the One higher than the Many, nor God higher than the world. To him these “[o]pposed elements stand to each other in mutual requirement.”⁶⁵ We must conclude that in fact Whitehead tries to avoid the pitfalls not only of nominalism but of Plato’s metaphysical realism as well. Nevertheless, the question may be asked why Whitehead wants to repudiate nominalism and returns to “participation.”

Maybe unexpectedly, Whitehead accounts for his rejection of nominalism primarily by reference to the problems faced by contemporary physics. The commonsense concept of nature signified by the expression “scientific materialism” tells us that there are independently existing substance that are only externally related to each other and moved from the outside. For Whitehead, this conception of nature is not only entirely insufficient to justify modern physics, but it is even self-contradictory, for all concepts used in modern physics—such as matter, space, time, substance, order—have

fundamentally changed.⁶⁶ He summarizes the situation by describing it as “a complete muddle.”⁶⁷

In other words, Whitehead tells us that modern science (the science after 1900) needs a better philosophical framework in which justice is done to interdependence, life, emergence, causation, experience, final causality, self-organization, and mind.⁶⁸ It is from this heartfelt need to provide a philosophical foundation to modern science, as well as to give in cosmology an intelligible place to the human being, that Whitehead fiercely objects to nominalism and—beyond realism and nominalism—constructs his “philosophy of organism.” And it is this organic metaphysics that not only allows for a better understanding of modern science but at the same time offers a splendid opportunity to rethink and express the mutual and intimate relationship between God and the world.

CONCLUSION

This chapter may have shown how, in undertaking his huge project of developing his organic philosophy, Whitehead found essential incentives and tools in the concepts of *incarnation* and *co-inherence* as developed by the early Christian theologians, and how he used those insights in his metaphysics generally as well as explicitly in his thinking about the intimate participative and incarnational relationship between God and the world. All of this puts Whitehead far away from nominalistic ways of thinking and makes him in many respects a congenial as well as refreshing source for Catholic thinking—more so than often is recognized.

NOTES

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 156 (hereafter “*RM*”).

2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 167 (hereafter “*AI*”).

3. *AI* 166–69; cf. *ibid.*, 129–30.

4. *Ibid.*, 148, 167.

5. Whitehead refers here to the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus* (*AI* 166n), which according to the standard view belong to Plato’s later dialogues. The chronology of Plato’s dialogues is however a contested issue. See Francisco Gonzalez, “Plato’s Dialectic of Forms,” in *Plato’s Forms. Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. William A. Welton (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 31–83. The “persuasion passage” is found in *Timaeus* 48a.

6. *AI* 166.

7. *Ibid.*, 167.

8. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929), corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 94–96 (hereafter “PR”).

9. AI 83; Plato, *Timaeus* 48a.

10. AI 166.

11. Plato, *Phaedo* (100c–d).

12. AI 166–67.

13. *Ibid.*, 167–68.

14. *Ibid.*, 168. Plato himself made an effort to bridge the gap between the Ideas and the transient world by introducing a third form, which he calls “*Khōra*” or “Receptacle.” In some passages, this receptacle resembles Aristotle’s prime matter, but it is mainly characterized as a space in which the Ideas are connected to the Copies (*Timaeus* 48e–52d). Throughout *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead pays a lot of attention to this Receptacle and considers it a “medium of intercommunication” (AI 134), but he does not make use of this notion in his search for the persuasiveness of the Ideas.

15. Cf. *Ibid.*, 168.

16. *Ibid.*, 167.

17. *Ibid.*, 168–69.

18. *Ibid.*, 169; cf. *ibid.*, 130.

19. *Ibid.*, 169.

20. *Ibid.*, 167.

21. The term “actual entity” denotes *all* final real entities (including God as well as the most trivial puff of existence—PR 18), whereas the term “actual occasion” (or “occasion” or “event” for short) only denotes *worldly* actual entities (thus God excluded—PR 88).

22. *Ibid.*, 22, 148.

23. AI 191–97.

24. Alfred North Whitehead, *Essays in Science and Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 118 (hereafter “ESP”); cf. AI 201.

25. Jorge L. Nobo, *Whitehead’s Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986), 1.

26. ESP 117–18.

27. PR 348.

28. John 1:14; 1:1.

29. PR 348.

30. RM 156.

31. Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; repr., New York: Free Press, 1967), 152 (hereafter “SMW”); and PR *passim*.

32. SMW 173–79. See Palmyre Oomen, “No Concretion without God,” in *La science et le monde moderne d’Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. François Beets, Michel Dupuis, and Michel Weber (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2006), 203–20.

33. PR 31–34.

34. *Ibid.*, 85, 224, 244.

35. *Ibid.*, 84.

36. *Ibid.*, 32.

37. *Ibid.*

38. AI 277, 253.

39. PR 224, 244; AI 198.

40. PR 244.

41. RM 155–56.

42. Ibid., 159.

43. Ibid., 62.

44. Cf. *ibid.*, 99.

45. *PR* 47.

46. It is in this decisive sense that Pseudo-Cyril and/or John of Damascus (seventh–eighth century) defined the term. See G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (1936; repr., London: S. P. C. K., 1952), chapter fourteen, esp. 296–330, and Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), chapter two.

47. *PR* 60, 309.

48. Ibid., 348.

49. Ibid., 345.

50. Ibid., 345–46.

51. For an extensive discussion, arguing—against the standard view—in favor of the prehensibility of God’s consequent nature, see Palmyre Oomen, “The Prehensibility of God’s Consequent Nature,” *Process Studies* 27.1–2 (1998): 108–33.

52. Reto Luzius Fetz, “‘Creativity’—A New Transcendental?” in *Whitehead’s Metaphysics of Creativity*, ed. Friedrich Rapp and Reiner Wiehl (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 189–208, esp. 198.

53. *PR* 343.

54. Ibid, 341, 348–49.

55. Ibid., 348.

56. Ibid., 349. For this reversal of God and the world to each other in respect of their process, see Oomen, “The Prehensibility of God’s Consequent Nature,” and Palmyre Oomen, “Language about God in Whitehead’s Philosophy: An Analysis and Evaluation of Whitehead’s God-Talk,” *Process Studies* 48.2 (2019): 198–218.

57. *PR* 348.

58. Ibid.

59. Palmyre Oomen, “God’s Power and Almightyness in Whitehead’s Thought,” *Process Studies* 47.1–2 (2018): 83–110, and Oomen, “Language about God in Whitehead’s Philosophy,” respectively.

60. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.44.1 co, Ia.44.2 co, Ia.45.5 co.; Ia.104.1.

61. Cf. *AI* 130.

62. Cf. *PR* 348. Whitehead is neither the first nor the only thinker who presents the idea of mutual participation between God and the world. It is to be found scattered through Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian thought: for example, in Maximus the Confessor, who refers not only to “incarnation” but also to a reciprocal “*theiosis*” or “*deification*” (*Ambiguum* 7 [PG 91:1084b]); in Meister Eckhart, Jürgen Moltmann, or Leonardo Boff, who writes that God and world are “related and mutually implicated in one another” (Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997], 147); or in the interreligious theologian Raimon Panikkar (Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010], 403).

63. *PR* 348–49.

64. The crucial impact of voluntarism and nominalism on the rise of modernity has been put forward by Paul Tillich in *A History of Christian Thought* (1956), ed. Carl E. Braaten (London: SCM Press, 1968), 180–91, 198–203. Later prominent accounts are Hans Blumenberg’s *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), Louis Dupré’s *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1933), Marcel Gauchet’s *Le désenchantement du Monde*

(Paris: Gallimard, 1985), and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). The role of Luther in this development is rather complex. At first, during his education, Luther welcomed the *via moderna* (nominalism), but later on the question of grace changed his attitude. Luther then accuses his nominalistic teacher Gabriel Biel of Pelagianism and takes more distance from the theological positions of the *via moderna*. See Rodney Howsare, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Protestantism* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 44–53.

65. *PR* 348.

66. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (1938; repr., New York: Free Press, 1968), 127–47.

67. *Ibid.*, 132.

68. *Ibid.*, 148–69.

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