

RELIGIOUS AND METAPHYSICAL INQUIRY

IN

WHITEHEAD'S THOUGHT

THE RELATION OF RELIGIOUS AND METAPHYSICAL INQUIRY  
IN THE THOUGHT OF  
ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

By

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## ABSTRACT

The major finding of this study is that Whitehead is engaged in a religious as well as a metaphysical inquiry. This religious inquiry is not confined to the dogmas of one religion but seeks to outline the logical structure of rational religious inquiry itself. Whitehead tries to show through an examination of phenomenological evidence that the basic question addressed by high religions is "What is the character permanently inherent in the universe?" The religious answer is not a dogmatic formulation but an intuition that settles conjointly the value of individuals for themselves and for each other and the value of the objective universe. But there can be no confirmation of the validity of a religious intuition apart from some definite metaphysical way of conceiving the universe. Thus rational religion must have recourse to metaphysics for a scrutiny of its terms.

Examination of Whitehead's metaphysics reveals that it is not a deductive system based upon self-evident premises. Deduction can only magnify the testability of premises. Before systematization begins and after it has been concluded the speculative philosopher must continue to confront his tentative formulations with the circumstances to which they should apply. Metaphysics is an ongoing adventure in the clarification of thought. Examination of Whitehead's metaphysical inquiry indicates that while religion may serve as a source of suggestions as to how to conceive the ultimate features of everything that is, the final judgment as to what sorts of things there are and how they are interrelated

are metaphysical decisions to be made on the basis of metaphysical criteria and not upon the basis of peculiarly religious evidence. The major instance where the generality of Whitehead's metaphysics might seem to be compromised by the introduction of a religious presupposition is the use of the concept "God" within his metaphysics. It is concluded that God is not introduced into his metaphysics as the logical subject of a particular religious intuition. God is introduced as a derivative metaphysical concept and the question of how this concept is to be understood and whether it refers to anything real is to be determined on the basis of metaphysical considerations.

At the point at which metaphysics is introduced into the structure of religious inquiry the question arises as to whether Whitehead's metaphysics compromises the generality of his religious inquiry. The first point to note is that any rational religion must have recourse to metaphysics to affirm the objective validity of its doctrines. It is clear that a metaphysics will not adjudicate seriously conflicting metaphysical presuppositions of different rational religions and find them equally valid. But this does not mean that serious discussion between conflicting religious traditions is arbitrarily terminated by the imposition of a metaphysics. In these instances a basic religious disagreement deepens into a basic metaphysical disagreement. The conflict is an invitation to a discussion of the first principles of metaphysics. This study also suggests that in his postulation of first metaphysical principles Whitehead does not arbitrarily dismiss divergent metaphysical conclusions.

Given the validity of Whitehead's metaphysics the question arises of how much can be affirmed solely upon the basis of an abstract general metaphysics and whether religion in any sense can be said to go beyond metaphysics. In Whitehead's view metaphysics does go beyond a mere intellectual unity of experience. The intellectual unity discerned by metaphysics is only a bringing to self-reflective awareness a unity that is already present at a more fundamental level of experiencing. However, in this study no adequate answer is found to the question of the extent to which metaphysics is demonstrative of more than an abstract intellectual unity in experience. It is concluded that in at least one sense religion does go beyond metaphysics. What escapes metaphysics is the concrete particularity of personal experience and the uniqueness of great religious insights whose "originality is the very element in their expression which remains unformularized"(RM 131). Religions claim more definite and concrete knowledge of the nature of things than can be ascertained on the basis of a general metaphysics. Given that these claims are consonant with the conclusions of metaphysics it is appropriate to assess these more detailed claims on the basis of more special evidence religious or otherwise (RM 107).

This thesis has found sufficient evidence to conclude that Whitehead is engaged in a religious inquiry whose purpose is to identify the sphere of religious activity in human life and to present an analysis of religious inquiry itself. The introduction of metaphysics into that inquiry has been examined in some detail. A partial answer has been suggested to the question of the degree to which religion may be said to go beyond truths discerned in a general metaphysics. The

precise nature of the relation of this analysis of religious inquiry to Whitehead's fully developed discussion of the notion of God is a topic awaiting further exploration as is also the question of the degree to which Whitehead's metaphysics may be considered demonstrative of more than an abstract intellectual unity of experience.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<u>2. Writings of Alfred North Whitehead</u>		<u>Date of Publication</u>
AI	<u>Adventures of Ideas</u>	1933
FR	<u>The Function of Reason</u>	1929
MT	<u>Modes of Thought</u>	1938
PR	<u>Process and Reality</u>	1929
RM	<u>Religion in the Making</u>	1926
S	<u>Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect</u>	1927
SMW	<u>Science and the Modern World</u>	1925
<u>3. Writings of Charles Hartshorne</u>		
<del>MVG</del>	<u>Man's Vision of God</u>	1941
PSG	<u>Philosophers Speak of God</u>	1953

The full bibliographic data for these works is to be found at the conclusion of the thesis.

## INTRODUCTION

In broad terms the purpose of this thesis is to clarify the relation between metaphysics and religion in the thought of Alfred North Whitehead.

Whitehead does not restrict himself to a single perspective in examining the relation of metaphysics and religion. He inquires about religion from the standpoint of metaphysics (PR 521) and he inquires about metaphysics from the standpoint of religion (RM 49-65). And he inquires about both metaphysics and religion from the standpoint of their capacity to justify the ideals of civilization while remaining consonant with the truths discerned through natural science (SMW 181; AI passim). Despite the diversity of perspectives from which Whitehead examines the relation of metaphysics and religion it is my opinion that his fundamental approach to the question is from the perspective of the metaphysician.

For Whitehead metaphysics is not a deductive system based upon self-evident premises. Deduction can only magnify the testability of premises. Their applicability must be tested "over the whole chain of consequences" (MVG 69). The metaphysician does not merely stand within a system and look out upon experience as data to be interpreted. He actively searches out experience that will challenge and test the limitations of systematic metaphysical proposals (MF 1-19). He stands on the side of experience and challenges his own system and he stands on the side of his system and challenges the accepted interpretation of

experience. The metaphysical perspective requires continual movement from experience to imaginative generalization and from imaginative generalization back to experience. There is no point at which the certainty of the system precludes the possibility of a new challenge from experience (PR 12).

Metaphysics as understood by Whitehead involves an inevitable circularity in reasoning. The systematic characterization of experience is tested in terms of its capacity to do justice to the facts of experience and the report on the facts of experience is tested in terms of the adequacy of its underlying metaphysical presuppositions. All circles need not be vicious. For example, my understanding of the notion "family" may be shaped by my understanding of the notion "parenthood" and I may understand "parenthood" only in the context of "family". The two understandings grow organically and are complementary. Clearly it is Whitehead's view that if metaphysics is to be considered a constructive endeavour it must involve such a complementary form of growth in understanding (PR 13f.). Historically, what has vitiated the effectiveness of metaphysics has not been its circularity but the unfortunate notion that deductive procedures could guarantee the unrestricted relevance of its primary notions. Whitehead argues that there is a complementary growth in understanding of the primary and general notions metaphysics seeks and of the concrete and particular facts and circumstances to which the metaphysical scheme must apply (PR 4-14).

This understanding of metaphysics requires that it incorporate a diversity of logical types of statements. If the relation of metaphysics to religion is to be elucidated then the different types of

statements used in Whitehead's metaphysics must be distinguished. His metaphysics incorporates nonsystematic, systematic and postsystematic statements.<sup>1</sup> The logical subjects and predicates of the nonsystematic statements are terms taken from ordinary discourse and receive their meaning in that context. "There are many finite things" and "primitive experience is emotional feeling" are examples of nonsystematic statements. Systematic statements concern relationships within a constructed scheme. Both the logical subjects and predicates are terms taken from the scheme. Systematic statements are not directly about the world nor are they derived deductively or inductively from nonsystematic statements. "A prehension has a subject, a datum, and a subjective form,"<sup>2</sup> is an example of a systematic statement. In postsystematic statements systematic terms are used to interpret nonsystematic terms. Postsystematic statements interpret various phenomena including sense experience, art, morality and religion and put them into a certain perspective. "Finite things that endure through time are nexūs of actual entities,"<sup>3</sup> is an example of a postsystematic statement.

The purpose of this thesis is to make explicit what Whitehead

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<sup>1</sup>This typology is derived from an article by William Christian. Christian speaks of nonsystematic terms and presystematic statements. I have used nonsystematic with reference both to statements and to terms. While the adjective presystematic correctly suggests the logical character of these statements it is misleading insofar as it suggests that their relevance is restricted to a period prior to the construction of a categorical scheme. See Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", The Relevance of Whitehead, ed. Ivor Leclerc (London, 1961), pp. 74-75.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

has discerned about the logical differences and logical connections between religious and metaphysical inquiry. There is no chapter in Whitehead's writings entitled "Important Logical Differences Between Religious and Metaphysical Inquiry". Nevertheless his writings do offer a subtle and cogent account of this relationship. It is not to be expected that Whitehead's account will be simple or conclusive. For Whitehead metaphysics is not static but an ongoing adventure in the clarification of thought (PR 14). The continuing interaction between metaphysics and the human interests which suggest cosmologies namely, science, aesthetics, ethics, and religion (SMW vii) defies definitive analysis. However, it is to be expected that careful study of Whitehead's discussion of the relation of metaphysical and religious inquiry will yield conclusions important to the clarification of Whitehead's thought and important to the elucidation of the differences and connections between religious and metaphysical inquiry.

I have accepted from William Christian the suggestion that Whitehead is engaged in a religious inquiry as well as a metaphysical one.<sup>4</sup> But I have reached a somewhat different conclusion as to the precise nature of their interconnection.<sup>5</sup> Independent of his discussion of Whitehead, Christian has written a most useful analysis of religious inquiry to which I am indebted.<sup>6</sup> To my knowledge Christian has not

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>5</sup>See below, pp. 89.

<sup>6</sup>William A. Christian, Meaning and Truth in Religion (Princeton, 1964).

attempted to apply this rigorous analysis to Whitehead's later writings as a whole.<sup>7</sup> An important feature of the present study is its attempt to clarify the structure of Whitehead's religious inquiry. Several factors contribute to its obscurity. His religious inquiry cannot be understood apart from an understanding of his metaphysical inquiry. Religious experience incorporates metaphysical presuppositions and the objectivity of religious intuitions is trusted only to the "extent . . . that the metaphysical doctrines are well founded" (RM 84). The degree of autonomy granted to religion cannot be discerned until the scope and the nature of metaphysical inquiry is made clear. For Whitehead the metaphysical perspective is the primary one. It is the "foundation of thought and life" (MT 63). Unfortunately, readers of Whitehead's most extensive discussion of religion, Religion in the Making<sup>8</sup> learn little about Whitehead's metaphysical system. Stylistically the book is difficult. The first half of most chapters is a phenomenological survey and commentary upon evidence whose relevance is not made clear until the termination of the theoretical discussion that comprises the second half of the chapter. These theoretical discussions are dense and cryptic and in many cases incomprehensible apart from a previous

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<sup>7</sup>White Christian has dealt with Whitehead's notion of God in "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion," Process and Reality, ed. William L. Reese and Eugene Freeman (Lasalle, 1964), pp. 181-203 and pointed out differences between Whitehead's basic religious and metaphysical questions in the article, "Some Uses of Reason" cited above, his account is not comprehensive. Specifically he has not applied his proposals to the interpretation of Religion in the Making.

<sup>8</sup>Religion in the Making was first published in 1926, one year after Science and the Modern World and three years previous to Whitehead's major philosophical work, Process and Reality.

acquaintance with PR.

I offer as a suggestion and not as a criticism of other analyses that a preoccupation with "God" as the middle term linking religion and metaphysics in Whitehead has overshadowed the relevance of his writing for answering the wider question of the relation of religious inquiry to metaphysical inquiry. When "God" is the starting-point of the analysis there is a tendency to reduce the metaphysical evidence to Whitehead's systematic and postsystematic statements concerning God and the religious evidence to the nonsystematic statements wherein "God" is identified as the basic religious dogma in dispute. Concentration on the specific question of "God" does not lead to the recognition that Whitehead saw the religious and metaphysical inquiry and their relation in some disengagement from the specific conclusions of his own systematic thought. In short a different starting-point will permit a different question to be considered. This is the justification for the structure of the present study.<sup>9</sup>

In the first two chapters I have focussed attention on the metaphysical perspective and specifically upon its nonsystematic features. Two reasons have prompted this decision. First, it is a sound heuristic principle to precede from the known to the unknown. The structure of Whitehead's metaphysics is clearer than that of his religious inquiry. Further, his religious inquiry presupposes an understanding of

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<sup>9</sup>I have in mind Charles Hartshorne's discussion of Whitehead in PSG, pp. 273-277 and 282-285 as a positive result of a preoccupation with the question of God. A misapplication of this preoccupation is to be found in John Cobb's discussion of Whitehead's religion. Cobb assumes that the religious significance of Whitehead's work is to be entirely defined in terms of its analysis of the concept "God". See A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia), 1965, pp. 215-251.



his metaphysics. Second, while the relevance of Whitehead's systematic and postsystematic metaphysical statements for religion are often considered, the importance of the nonsystematic both for his metaphysics and for the relation of that metaphysics to religion is often overlooked. In the third chapter evidence for Whitehead's interest in religion is examined. It is argued that Whitehead's intention is to present an analysis of religious inquiry. He considers a variety of answers to the basic religious questions he identifies through a phenomenological survey of the history of religion and religion as a factor in individual human experience. I have attempted to show that in intent and in execution his analysis of religious inquiry is not closed by a narrow prejudging of the relevance of evidence. Specifically I have argued that his analysis does not preclude a priori the relevance of non-theistic answers to basic religious questions. In the fourth and final chapter the question of the relation of religion to metaphysics is re-examined in light of the proposal that Whitehead's discussion of religion is an analysis of religious inquiry. An attempt is made to distinguish what is clear and remains problematic about the relation of religion and metaphysics in Whitehead's thought. The study terminates with a synopsis of my conclusions.

## CHAPTER I

### THE METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Whitehead's understanding of the nature of metaphysics. As a first step it is important to clarify the status of the various works used as evidence. I concur with Hartshorne's view that prior to the writing of Process and Reality "Whitehead was groping toward his philosophy".<sup>1</sup> It is only in Process and Reality and the two later works, Adventure of Ideas and Modes of Thought that he was free to expound his position.<sup>2</sup>

In much of Whitehead's writing the words "metaphysics" and "philosophy" seem to be used almost interchangeably. To my knowledge Whitehead nowhere defines their interconnection. I accept Ivor Leclerc's suggestion<sup>3</sup> that for Whitehead "philosophy" is a generic term encompassing a number of interdependent endeavours including metaphysics, epistemology, cosmology, aesthetics and ethics. But

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead and Contemporary Philosophy", Ivor Leclerc (ed.) The Relevance of Whitehead (London, 1961), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Process and Reality was first published in 1929, Adventure of Ideas in 1933 and Modes of Thought in 1938. Two earlier works, Science and the Modern World (1925) and Religion in the Making (1926) while important for this paper, cannot be taken as complete statements of Whitehead's subtle understanding of the relation between metaphysics and religion.

<sup>3</sup>Ivor Leclerc, Whitehead's Metaphysics (London, 1958), p. 29f.

metaphysics is the fundamental endeavour. It determines the basis for addressing the more special problems that are subdivisions of the genus of philosophy. For most purposes the terms speculative philosophy and metaphysics are synonymous.

## 2. The Task of Metaphysics

The task of speculative philosophy is to

endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element in our experience can be interpreted . . . everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme (PR 4).

Such an endeavour seems to presuppose that the world is rational, for it seeks to understand everything that is in terms of one set of rationally co-ordinated principles. For Whitehead the claim that the world is rational is not a premise peculiar to metaphysics. "It is the faith which forms the motive for the pursuit of all sciences alike, including metaphysics (PR 67). The peculiar task of metaphysics is to justify that faith by enabling us to grasp "the rationality of things" (PR 67). All attempts to seek comprehensive explanations presuppose the ultimate intelligibility of being itself. In this sense Augustine's formula, credo ut intelligam applies to science as well as theology. But man can subject this implicit confidence in rationality to reflective analysis. This reflective reason or theoretical reason is then "faith seeking understanding" (fides quaerens intellectum). While this faith may be in some sense unavoidable this does not guarantee that it is accurately discerned

or expressed in reflective analysis.<sup>4</sup> In this sense rationalism is not a premise but "an ideal which is seeking satisfaction" (PR 67).

The metaphysical task is not susceptible to quick completion regardless of whether it is true that the world is rational. The limitations of finitude prevent anything but an asymptotic approach to a scheme capable of displaying the rationality of everything that is. Hence "rationalism never shakes of its status as an experimental adventure" (PR 14).

But however partial the success in coherent explanation it is of far reaching importance. For the essence of civilization is the surveyance of "the world with some large generality of understanding" (MT 4). To expand the scope of generalization is to broaden the basis of civilization. But growth in rational power demands that explanation be pushed to its utmost limits. This is the task of speculative metaphysics.

Regardless of the thoroughness of explanation some element of brute fact must remain. Metaphysics must endeavour to explain all that is explicable but explanation requires that there be some given

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<sup>4</sup>In Whitehead's view metaphysics, along with other forms of rational activity rests upon a faith that reality is intelligible. But at a later point it will be shown that Whitehead repudiates the use of specifically religious evidence as the basis for metaphysical conclusions. Prima facie these contentions may appear incompatible. The key to a consistent interpretation of his position is Whitehead's use of the phrase "specifically religious evidence" rather than simply "religious evidence". Whitehead accepts the relevance of religious evidence for metaphysical formulation insofar as that evidence is based upon and supported by the general experience of mankind. Insofar as it arises from specific moments of "supernormal insight" (RM 31) peculiar to an exceptional individual or a religious tradition and does not find support in the experience of all men it is not to be used to support a general metaphysical theory. Whitehead's account suggests a distinction analogous to that between general and special revelation in Christian theology.

elements to be explained. Given the hope of rationalism, these final final facts must all exemplify the same generic features (PR 168). The rationalistic ideal requires "a one-substance cosmology" (PR 29).<sup>5</sup>

For Whitehead the final real things of which the world is made up are actual entities also termed actual occasions.<sup>6</sup> "There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real" (PR 27). Actual entities may have "gradations of importance and diversities of function" but actual entities qua actual entities are "all on the same level" (PR 28). If rationality is an all pervasive feature of the world then connectedness is the essence of things. While rationality is not a premise peculiar to metaphysics it is the task of metaphysics to show that this supposition is not incoherent with the deliverances of experience. Metaphysics seeks to find that pattern of things that justifies the conviction that ultimately things do cohere in a rational manner. Whitehead must show a basis in experience for asserting the oneness of the generic features of the experienced external world and the experiencer. He must also endeavour to show that the generic features are indeed generic, i. e. that no item of experience is incapable of interpretation in terms of these features.

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<sup>5</sup>The generic features the metaphysician seeks must apply not only to the actual world but to all possible worlds. These features are completely general and invariant. Metaphysics is the attempt to discover the completely general features every cosmic epoch must demonstrate. Cosmology, in contrast to metaphysics, is the attempt to understand the present cosmic epoch in terms of the completely general or metaphysical nature of things. See Ivor Leclerc, op. cit., p. 224f.

<sup>6</sup>"Actual entity" is the generic term. The term "actual occasion" applies only to actual entities that have temporal beginnings and endings.

Metaphysics is the search for the characteristics of an actual entity that should apply to all actual entities. The nature of finitude poses restrictions upon the achievement of this goal. This does not imply "that there are finite aspects of things which are intrinsically incapable of entering into our human knowledge" (MT 42). But things are known only in some of their perspectives. "The totality of perspective involves an infinitude beyond finite knowledge" (MT 42). There is a second obstacle to achievement of the goal. What the metaphysician seeks are the invariant features of the actual world, including ourselves. But in actual experience the variant not the invariant catches our attention. "Facility of observation depends on the fact that the object observed is important when present, and sometimes is absent" (PR 7). But generic features can never be absent. They can only be discovered by imaginative penetration and generalization controlled by the requirements of coherence and logic.

### 3. The Method of Metaphysics

The method of discovery is the method of the "working hypothesis". The purpose of this method is "to coordinate the current expressions of human experience, in common speech, in social institutions, in actions, [and] in the principles of the various special sciences" (AT 222). The method 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 7).

It must be recognized that "the accurate expression of the final

generalities is the goal of the discussion and not its origin" (PR 12). An imaginative generalization or a working hypothesis must meet the test not only of internal coherence and logical consistency but also of adequacy. Adequacy does not mean adequacy over such items of experience as happen to have been considered. Adequacy means that no item of experience may be found incapable of interpretation in terms of the scheme (PR 4-5).

All systematic thought including imaginative generalization in metaphysics is inherently selective in its choice of evidence. The goal of metaphysics is to display all of the self-evidence "concerning the fundamental nature of things and their connection" (MT 48). "Philosophy can exclude nothing" (MT 2). Hence systematization is but a part of the procedure. It cannot be either the starting point or the terminus of metaphysical endeavour if it is to avoid "the narrowness inherent in all finite systems" (MT 2). Before systematization begins and after it has been concluded the speculative philosopher must continue to confront his tentative formulations with the circumstances to which they should apply. The metaphysician must attend to those general uncoordinated, nonsystematic characterizations of our experience evidenced in the directed activities of mankind. This is the endeavour Whitehead calls "philosophical assemblage" (MT 2).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The term "nonsystematic" is applicable to philosophical assemblage in two senses. The endeavour itself is nonsystematic in the sense that no particular metaphysical scheme dictates the relevance of the evidence in advance. Second, the statements which are considered in the process of philosophical assemblage and the conclusions reached within the process are expressed in nonsystematic terms.

While the first step in philosophical assemblage is to examine "ultimate notions, as they occur naturally in daily life" (MT 1) in some disengagement from inherited modes of understanding, it is clear that this does not represent the entire scope of the undertaking.

"Men can be provincial in time, as well as in place" (SMW vii).

Philosophical assemblage as set forth in Modes of Thought involves constant consideration of the history of ideas and what it teaches about the metaphysical endeavour. It is clear that the truths discerned through this procedure provide the groundwork for Whitehead's systematic endeavour. There is no sharp distinction between the conclusions arising from philosophical assemblage and the starting-point of systematic coordination. But insofar as conclusions are expressed in terminology that is not part of the categorical scheme and insofar as the conclusions are supported by an appeal to the self-evidence of experience rather than an appeal to their consonance with a coordinated system, these conclusions are conclusions of philosophical assemblage. This interpretation of philosophical assemblage is not to be construed as a broadening of Whitehead's terminology for the purposes of this thesis. It is meant to be an accurate description of Whitehead's own understanding of the scope of philosophical assemblage. Clearly, any attempt to set forth accurately Whitehead's understanding of metaphysics cannot ignore the central importance of systematic thought in Whitehead's metaphysics. Later sections of this thesis focus upon conclusions about the relation between religion and metaphysics that are clearly derivative from Whitehead's systematic thought.

While it is clear that Whitehead regards his own system as a



genuine and significant characterization of a wide range of the facts of experience, he also views its adequacy as a formulation of the ultimate generalities as no more than transient. Whitehead does not exclude his own system when he declares that "in its turn every philosophy will suffer a deposition" (PR 11). There is no question that Whitehead believes that philosophic systems do express a variety of truths about the universe. It is equally clear that there are no grounds for a simple equation of Whitehead's understanding of the metaphysical endeavour with his own working hypothesis. The working hypothesis does not comprise the total content of Whitehead's metaphysics. It is an imaginative flight that begins and ends upon the ground of observation he calls "philosophical assemblage". The starting-point and unending task of metaphysics is to test the adequacy of its systematic formulations against "the current expressions of human experience, in common speech, in social institutions, in actions[and] in the principles of [diverse] sciences" (AI 222). It is through this procedure that questions requiring systematic elucidation are identified and discrepancies in systematic answers are exposed. Through philosophical assemblage philosophical systems are kept open.

There are grounds to conclude that Whitehead regarded his contribution to philosophical assemblage as no less significant than his contribution to systematic philosophy. It is noteworthy that his final book, Modes of Thought, and much of the book preceding it, Adventures of Ideas, are dedicated to demonstrating the procedures and results of his own attempts at philosophical assemblage rather than to the clarification and resolution of difficulties discerned in his systematic formulations.

It is of more than passing interest that he claims the greatness of Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz and William James, despite their important systematic endeavours, rests more upon their achievements in philosophical assemblage (MT 2-3).

#### 4. Conclusions

In this brief introductory chapter I have endeavoured to show that for Whitehead metaphysics is an ongoing adventure in the clarification of thought. Its goal, which can only be approached asymptotically, is to identify the generic features of the actual world and all possible worlds. The method of metaphysics incorporates both systematic and nonsystematic elements. Imaginative systematic generalization and philosophical assemblage are not two distinct ways of doing metaphysics but rather two aspects of one continuing metaphysical endeavour. It is of considerable importance for the interpretation of what follows that the nature of the contrast suggested by these terms be understood. The systematic aspect of Whitehead's endeavour is readily identifiable. It is comprised of the content of the categorical scheme and those propositions that can be logically derived from it. Philosophical assemblage is the compilation of general truths that emerge uncoordinated from the store-house of crude evidence on which philosophy bases its discussion. The main sources of evidence are "language, social institutions, and action, including thereby the fusion of the three which is language interpreting action and social institutions" (AI 226). Philosophical assemblage is the starting-point and terminus of systematic endeavour. When a working hypothesis fails to achieve adequate generality it may nevertheless comprise a useful

contribution to philosophical assemblage: a generalization awaiting conciliation with other generalizations by the production of a working hypothesis with a wider sweep. At the same time the truths of philosophical assemblage are no more than half-truths.

All general truths condition each other;  
and the limits of their application cannot  
be adequately defined apart from their  
correlation by yet wider generalities (PR 15).

One effort therefore of any systematic scheme is to challenge the half-truths emerging from philosophical assemblage.

One purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of religion within that ongoing adventure Whitehead terms "metaphysics". Another purpose of this thesis is to consider the impact of Whitehead's metaphysical conclusions upon the interpretation of religion. In this chapter the bare structure of that metaphysics has been outlined. In the chapters that follow consideration will be given to various aspects of the question of how religion emerges as a factor within metaphysics and how metaphysics emerges as a factor within religion.

## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION WITHIN THE METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### 1. Introduction

The preceding chapter indicated the general structure of Whitehead's metaphysical endeavour. This chapter examines in considerable detail how religion emerges as a factor within that metaphysics. The purpose of this examination is to show that religion makes a significant contribution to Whitehead's metaphysical endeavour but at the same time does not compromise the generality of that inquiry. A second purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of the nonsystematic in Whitehead's metaphysics for the interpretation of its relation to religion. In order to facilitate these objectives I have divided what Whitehead calls "philosophical assemblage" into three stages. The first stage is Whitehead's informal consideration of the broad generalities underlying experience. The second stage is his criticism of current presuppositions about the general character of experience and his alternative formulation of these generalizations. The third stage is Whitehead's tentative evaluation of what comprises the essential features of an adequate metaphysics and what realm of experience most accurately reveals them. This chapter deals not only with philosophical assemblage but also with Whitehead's imaginative systematic construction. In this context attention is directed to the emergence of the concept "God" and its logical status within Whitehead's

systematic metaphysics. The final section of this chapter sets forth the conclusions to be derived from this examination.

## 2. Philosophical Assemblage: Stage I

Whitehead's final book, Modes of Thought is his clearest and most extensive demonstration of the findings and techniques of what he calls philosophical assemblage. The purpose in examining Modes of Thought is to conceive Whitehead's understanding of the relation between religion and metaphysics in some disengagement from the implications of the categorical scheme, Whitehead's own systematic endeavour at imaginative generalization.

### Importance, Matter-of-Fact, and Religion

Not surprisingly in the labour of philosophical assemblage Whitehead follows his own advice. He examines broad generalities underlying common speech, activity, and natural science. He identifies the notions of importance and matter-of-fact as two contrasted ideas underlying "all width of experience". "The two notions are antithetical, and require each other" (MT 4). Importance is such an all pervasive notion in human experience that it appears to be generic. Morality, logic, religion and art are but sub-species. But none of these exhaust the whole meaning of importance. Religion and morality are but two particular types of value experience. There are perspectives of the universe to which one or both are irrelevant (MT 11). For example, the beauty of the opera Carmen is not dependent on the morality of its characters. In limiting the generality of religious and moral considerations Whitehead suggests a fundamental differentiation between

morality and religion. Morality is the aim at perfection of importance for the immediate occasions. "Religion emphasizes the unity of ideal inherent in the universe (MT 28; see also, MT 14). If this is what religion is, it is clear that its validity is contingent upon affirmation that there are grounds for postulating a "unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MT 28). Religion emerges as a sub-species of importance. It is clear that the necessary, if not sufficient condition for affirming the objective validity of religion is a metaphysical justification of the premise that value experience is reflective not merely of the directed activity of mankind but of the very nature of the universe. If religion is a "direct apprehension of a character exemplified in the actual universe" (RM 84) it is clear that that character includes in itself metaphysical presuppositions. To trust the objectivity of religion is to hold that its metaphysical doctrines are well-founded. This proposal as to the nature of religion is not derived from Whitehead's categorical scheme. It is an empirical generalization concerning the nature of religion. The implication to be drawn from it is clear. Religion presupposes metaphysics and the necessary condition for the validity of the religion is the validity of its metaphysical presuppositions.<sup>1</sup>

#### Finitude, Inconsistency and Process

In Modes of Thought, Whitehead recurs to a theme already

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<sup>1</sup>Whitehead's statement that Christianity "has always been a religion seeking a metaphysic" (RM 50) is not to be construed as an exception to this conclusion. See below, p. 82.

familiar, the incompleteness of finite understanding. He draws the conclusion that understanding is fuller when it is recognized that "it always bears the character of a process of penetration, incomplete and partial" and that any completion attained is a completion in relation to an "undefined environment, imposing a perspective and awaiting exploration" (MT 43). The incompleteness of knowing suggests a general character of experience whose special forms are termed "frustration", "disorder", "incompleteness", "evil", and "error" (MT 50). It has been a temptation to philosophers not to acknowledge this character as fundamental. There is a tendency to "weave a fairy tale of the adjustment of factors; and then as an appendix introduce the notion of frustration, as a secondary aspect" (MT 50). On the basis of a display of self-evidence and apart from any systematic inference Whitehead upholds the claim that "there is no reason to hold that confusion is less fundamental than is order" (MT 50). It follows that a philosophical working hypothesis must allow room for both and at the same time account for the possibility of enlargement of understanding.

Understanding, however imperfect, is the identification of pattern, so far as it has been discriminated.

A partially understood pattern is more definite as to what it excludes than as to what its completion would include. As to inclusion there are an infinitude of alternative modes of completion. But so far as there is any definiteness attaching to the incomplete disclosure, certain factors are definitely excluded (MT 52).

The whole basis of logic may be derived from the concept of inconsistency. It provides a definition of the finite as "that which excludes other things comparable to itself" (MT 52). It suggests that

frustration and incompleteness are intimately connected with finite mentality. This basis for logic elucidates the role of process as a fundamental fact in our experience. We experience an always shifting present derived from the past yet shaping and passing into the future. This is the inexorable fact of process in the universe. The interweaving of change and permanence is a primary fact of experience. The definiteness of finite experience involves exclusion. It involves the notion that "two states of things which constitute the respective meanings of a pair of propositions cannot exist together" (MT 53).<sup>2</sup> Yet in the judgment of inconsistency these two states are somehow brought into juxtaposition. This suggests that the notions of connectedness and disconnection are highly ambiguous. Process suggests a way whereby the universe can escape "from the exclusions of inconsistency" (MT 54). Exclusions belong to a finite environment but process is infinite. Since process is infinite every contradiction can become a contrast within an infinitely vast spectrum.

This understanding of logic, inconsistency, and process has very important implications for the transferal of ideas applicable in one environment to another environment whether it be of wider or narrower scope. The growth of a specialization in any topic changes its meaning from top to bottom. "For it presupposes a more strictly defined environment" (MT 55). There are two kinds of growth in understanding. There is advance in the use of assigned patterns to

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<sup>2</sup>This is Leibniz's doctrine of impossibility.



coordinate detail. But the pattern restricts the choice of details. An equally important form of advance is the introduction of novel pattern into conceptual experience. Intelligence is dwarfed wherever dogmatism arises concerning the pattern of connections. "The characters of the things connected enter into the character of the connectivity which joins them" (MT 58). Hence the validity of a pattern of connection is not determinable apart from consideration of the degree of abstraction involved. "Consistency grows with abstraction from the concrete" (MT 59). The closer one moves to the concrete the more inconsistency rules.

There is an ambiguity in the notion of inconsistency. For example, if a patch of canvas is scarlet it cannot be also pale blue (MT 59f.). There may also be a distinction in aesthetic enjoyment. If blue is a factor in a great work of art its substitution by red in the same geometrical position could destroy its aesthetic value. If geometrical relations alone are considered, red or blue may equally well mark out the area. The fundamental difference between logical and aesthetic inconsistency is the degree of abstraction involved. "By reason of the greater concreteness of the aesthetic experience, it is a wider topic than that of the logical experience" (MT 62). Both logic and aesthetics concentrate upon closed patterns of fact. But life is "passed in the experience of disclosure" (MT 62). Hence a metaphysical working hypothesis must account not only for detail, system, and continuity but also the emergence of novelty.

#### The Implications For Religion

All the notions introduced here with only the slightest element of systematization are of high significance not merely for the metaphysical

endeavour but for the characterization of its relation to religion. The working hypothesis of a metaphysics is not a dogmatic statement "of the final generalities" (PR 12). It is only a partially understood pattern. In relation to the topic of religion it will be more definite as to what it excludes than as to what it includes. A metaphysical system defines the limits of religion but it leaves open an infinitude of possibilities concerning its detailed content (MT 52).<sup>3</sup> Implicit in the notion that disorder and frustration are fundamental is a critique of any religious formulation that denies the fundamental character of disorder as well as order in the nature of things. Another feature of this discussion is a clear warning that the interpretation of the nature of any phenomena presupposes an environment that is fundamentally altered by the pursuit of specialist interests. A primary function of the present endeavour is to identify the environment relevant to the assessment of Whitehead's conclusions about religion. A clear implication of his philosophical assemblage is that any particular topic including religion will be affected as knowledge increases. "The principles of religion may be eternal but expressions of these principles requires continual development" (SMW 189). There is no "sphere of human knowledge characterized by unalloyed truth" (MT 69).

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<sup>3</sup>This is perhaps suggestive of a way of interpreting the perennial problem of the relation between general and special revelation in Christian theology. In the third chapter the effects of adoption of Whitehead's metaphysics upon the openness and generality of religious inquiry will be examined. See below, p. 81ff.

### 3. Philosophical Assemblage: Stage II

In the second stage of philosophical assemblage attention shifts from the naive interrogation of daily experience to the interrogation of daily experience in conjunction with our inherited ways of understanding it.

#### Whitehead's Attack on Descartes and Hume

The only perspective for understanding the world is the perspective on the world available in human experience (MT 70). It has already been noted that central to Whitehead's metaphysics is the search for pattern in things that justifies the conviction that ultimately things do cohere in a rational manner.<sup>4</sup> The crucial step in metaphysics is the question of "the character to be assigned to the datum in the act of experience"(PR 238). The distinctive feature of post-Cartesian philosophy that Whitehead calls into question is what he terms "the subjectivist principle"(PR 238). He accepts from Descartes the notion that "subjects enjoying . . . experiences provide the primary data for philosophy, namely, themselves as in the enjoyment of such experience(PR 241). But it is Whitehead's conviction that Descartes and his successors, Locke and Hume, did not grasp the full significance of Descartes' discovery. They assumed that "the datum in the act of experience can be adequately analysed purely in terms of universals" (PR 239). This is the "subjectivist principle". It reduces the datum of experience to a universal quality qualifying the

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<sup>4</sup>See above, p. 11.

mind of the perceiver. When adhered to consistently it leads to what Santayana termed the "solipsism of the present moment". Whitehead "reforms" the subjectivist principle by balancing it with an objectivist principle. He holds that experience reveals not simply universals but actual entities. This is Whitehead's reformed subjectivist principle. It is the claim that "the 'content' of experience is not a purely private qualification of the mind, but is constituted by the immanence of external things".<sup>5</sup> Unless the subjectivist principle can be reformed there is no basis for the claim that human experience provides a ground for the conviction that things do cohere in a rational manner. It is Whitehead's contention that the subjectivist principle is based upon an inadequate account of human experience. Whitehead contrasts his own account with that of Hume.

Whitehead accepts from Hume "the principle of the derivation of conceptual experience from physical experience" (PR 382) but he rejects the identification of physical experience with "sense-perception". Whitehead identifies instead two modes of non-conceptual or direct human experience. He calls one "the mode of 'presentational immediacy' and the other the mode of 'causal efficacy'" (S 17). By "presentational immediacy" he means "what is usually termed 'sense-perception'" (S 21). Whitehead accepts Hume's dictum that perception of clear and distinct sense data immediately present discloses neither causal connection nor anything beyond what is immediately present to the senses. His argument against Hume is that there is more to perception than what is

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<sup>5</sup>Ivor Leclerc, Whitehead's Metaphysics, op. cit., p. 121.

grasped in the mode of "presentational immediacy". "Hume's error was not in what he inferred from presentational immediacy, but that he argued from a faulty analysis of perception as a whole".<sup>6</sup> Both Descartes and Hume agree "that sense-perception of the contemporary world is accompanied by perception of the 'withness' of the body" (PR 125). We see "with out eyes" and we hear "with out ears". But in their theoretical accounts Hume and Descartes mistakenly ignored this "withness of the body" and "confined perception to presentational immediacy" (PR 125). For Whitehead "withness of the body" is the starting-point for knowledge of the external world. "We find here our direct knowledge of 'causal efficacy'" (PR 125). There is a "sense of qualitative experience derived from antecedent fact, enjoyed in the personal unity of present fact, and conditioning future fact" (MT 71). There is a "sense of derivation from without, the sense of immediate enjoyment within, and the sense of transmission beyond" (MT 71). The primary perception is "feeling the body as functioning" (PR 125). It is the experience or feeling of bodily unity (MT 158). But the body is only "a peculiarly intimate bit of the world" (PR 126). And we cannot determine exactly where a body ends and where external nature begins (MT 21). Human experience is not detached from external things. It reveals both causal feelings of an external world and the influence of the past as well as clear and distinct sense impressions of the immediate contemporary world.

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<sup>6</sup>Donald W. Sherburne (ed.), A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality (New York, 1966), p. 99.

Hume's analysis of experience "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" (PR 79). Hume's distinct *sensa* are not the most stable but "the most variable elements in our lives" (MT 112). Despite their importance these sense experiences are non-essential to the existence of the organism. "The blind and the deaf are capable of the ultimate greatness of life" (MT 30). The description of the essence of experience

must apply to the unborn child, . . . to the state of sleep, and to that vast background of feeling hardly touched by consciousness. Clear conscious discrimination is an accident of human existence. It makes us human. But it does not make us exist. It is of the essence of our humanity. But it is an accident of our existence (MT 116).

The fundamental form of experience is "emotional feelings, felt in its relevance to a world beyond" (PR 247). A further objection to Hume's characterization is that it fails to account for "our ordinary beliefs, in which he shares" (PR 229). He thereby violates "the metaphysical rule of evidence: that we must bow to those presumptions, which, in spite of criticism, we still employ for the regulation of our lives. . . . Rationalism is the search for the coherence of such presumptions" (PR 229). Insofar as Hume may be construed "as remaining content with two uncoordinated sets of beliefs, one based on the critical examination of our sources of knowledge, and the other on the critical examination of beliefs involved in 'practice,' [he] reaches the high watermark of anti-rationalism in philosophy" (PR 232). Both Hume and Descartes are guilty of an arbitrary disconnection of first principles.

### The Implications for Religion

Hume makes clear what follows if sense perception is taken as the model for interpreting the ultimate principles underlying natural occurrences (MF 73). Concentration upon mere sense data reveals nothing but a mere succession of details. There is a qualitative subjective experience and nothing more. The universe as a whole is a meaningless notion. If experience is analyzed primarily in terms of an initial clarity of sense "the mass of our moral, emotional and purposive experience is rendered trivial and accidental" (MF 109). It follows that religion and all questions concerning value are cut off from the scope of rational understanding and therefore are irrelevant to philosophical inquiry. Philosophy becomes the consideration of "quantity and number" and all attempts to extend rational knowledge beyond these bonds is "mere sophistry and illusion".<sup>7</sup> Rational religion is then a contradiction in terms and books purporting to reason about religion are nothing but sophistry. Their proper fate is to be committed "to the flames".<sup>8</sup>

If perception in the mode of causal efficacy is taken as fundamental, a different conclusion arises. The claim metaphysics seeks to justify is that a one-substance cosmology is possible (PR 29). The "direct evidence as to the connectedness of one's immediate present occasion of experience with one's immediately past occasions, can be . . . used to suggest categories applying to the connectedness of all

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<sup>7</sup>David Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Oxford, 1951), p. 165.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

occasions in nature" (MT 115).—The final facts have then the character of occasions of experience. Nature is "constituted by innumerable 'drops of experience', each of which enjoys its own 'subjective immediacy'".<sup>9</sup> Immediate experience is "a fact in history, derivative, actual, and effective" (MT 72). Each occasion of experience is a perspective unification of the whole of things in one complex unity of feeling. It follows that independent existence is a myth. This is the explanation of experience that emerges if perception in the mode of causal efficacy is taken as fundamental. It is Whitehead's contention that "emotional feelings, felt in . . . relevance to a world beyond" (PR 247) is the primary form of experience and that sense-experience is derivative from it (MT 73).

#### The Role of Religion in Metaphysical Debate

The fundamental move for the determination of the relation between metaphysics and religion is the metaphysical decision as to what aspect of experience most fully exhibits the universal necessities of existence. The point of immediate interest is not whether Hume or Whitehead is correct. The point of interest is that Whitehead firmly contends that the basic decision as to what are the broad generalities underlying existence and what aspects of experience most fully exhibits them (MT 114) is a metaphysical decision to be made on the basis of metaphysical considerations and not upon the basis of special religious considerations. Whitehead has unkind words for the Leibnizian attempt

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<sup>9</sup>Schubert M. Ogden, "The Structure of Whitehead's Philosophy", (unpublished paper), p. 1.



to characterize the disclosures of human experience as evidence for the conclusion that this is the "best of all possible worlds". It was "an audacious fudge produced in order to save the face of a Creator constructed by contemporary, and antecedent, theologians . . . the actual flux presents itself with the character of being merely 'given.' It does not disclose any peculiar character of 'perfection.'" (PR 74). In Whitehead's rejection of Hume's and Descartes' characterization of experience his practice is consistent with his tenet that metaphysics is the highest court of arbitration (AI 162). The reasons offered for the rejection are metaphysical and in no way peculiarly religious. Whitehead takes issue with Hume not because Hume is impious but because he chooses to interpret the underlying necessities of existence on the basis of the "most variable elements in our lives" (MT 112). Despite the importance of sense experience they are non-essential to the existence of the organism. "The blind and the deaf are capable of the ultimate greatness of life" (MT 30). At a later point the significance for the structure of religious inquiry of the fact that metaphysics and not religion determines what aspect of experience most fully exhibits the universal necessities of existence will be examined.<sup>10</sup>

#### Whitehead's Account of Experience

In his philosophical assemblage Whitehead concludes that sense percepta are not the primary form of experience or human knowing.

The study of human knowledge should start with a survey of the vague variety, discernible in the transitions of human experience. It cannot safely base

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<sup>10</sup> See below, p. 81.

itself upon simple arbitrary assumptions, such as this assumption of spatio-temporal patterns of sensa as the source of all knowledge (MT 74).

Whitehead suggests three principles of division dominate our experiencing. They are three pairs of opposites--clarity and vagueness, order and disorder, the good and the bad. Order and goodness are associated. "... there can be no excellence except upon some basis of order.<sup>11</sup> Mere disorder results in a nonentity of achievement" (MT 75). Animal life depends upon the predominance of certain forms of order. The uniqueness of man rests in his capacity not only to enjoy structure but also to understand its underlying principles. He can abstract dominating principles from the welter of detail and apply the principle in the construction of alternative realizations. "Mankind enjoys a vision of the function of form within fact, and of the issue of value from this interplay" (MT 77). A vivid sense of good and bad cannot arise apart from discernment of differences and a discernment of differences requires the identification of definite patterns. Implicit in definiteness are the notions of exclusion and finitude. Whitehead suggests that in discussion of religious experience "an unbalanced emphasis has been placed upon the mere sense of infinitude" (MT 78). There is no realization of value apart from some sense of finitude. Importance requires the fusion of the finite and the infinite. The finite alone is trivial. The infinite alone is vacuous. Clarity and order

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<sup>11</sup> Earlier it was noted that Whitehead insists that confusion is no less fundamental than order. See above, p.21. Whitehead is arguing neither that disorder is derivative from order nor that order is derivative from disorder. Rather, both presuppose an essential interconnectedness of things. "For disorder shares with order the common characteristic that they imply many things interconnected" (AI 288).

are closely associated with the good for they provide the stability and predictability necessary to the achievement of high goals. But "the universe refuses the deadening influence of complete conformity" (MT 87f.). Apart from change creation is a meaningless notion. Where there is not change there is no time. "The universe is reduced to static futility--devoid of life and motion" (MT 87). In actual experience there is never complete order nor complete disorder.<sup>12</sup>

There is a transition within the dominant order; and there is transition to new forms of dominant order. Such transition is a frustration of the prevalent dominance. And yet it is the realization of that vibrant novelty which elicits the excitement of life (MT 87).

Philosophy and religion, as influenced by orthodox philosophic thought, have conceived changeless order as the final perfection. As a consequence the most evident characteristic of our experience has been subordinated to the status of a partial reality. Without transition and turmoil the world is frozen, motionless and meaningless. What is required is a metaphysical account that takes seriously the fundamental role of change, transition, and novelty in the universe as it is discerned through human experiencing (MT 80f.)

In accounting for the presence of order in experience western philosophy has presupposed "the necessity of static spatio-temporal, and physical forms of order" (MT 88). However, increasing scientific knowledge has swept away any ground for the assumption of a necessary

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<sup>12</sup>Hartshorne suggests that there is a "good deal of support in experience, logic, and intellectual history for what Morris Cohen called the 'Law of Polarity'. According to this law, ultimate contraries are correlatives mutually independent, so that nothing real can be described by the wholly one-sided assertion of simplicity, being, . . . and the like . . . independent of . . . related contraries" (PSG 2).

static order. What science discerns is not "transition of static forms" but "forms of transition" (MT 82). The metaphysician must account for the overwhelming indications of order in experience and at the same time the continuing frustration of order and the absence of necessity in any particular form of order (MT 88). Too much attention has been focussed on mere datum and its issue. "The essence of existence lies in the transition from datum to issue" (MT 96). It is in transition itself that the interconnection of permanence and novelty, clarity and vagueness, order and disorder is to be discerned. Process is then the fundamental category for the interpretation of experience.

Whitehead's rejection of sense perception as the basic mode of experiencing leads him to focus attention on perception in the mode of causal efficacy as that "aspect of experience which most fully exhibits the universal necessities of existence" (MT 113). "The main characteristic of such experience is complexity, vagueness, and compulsive intensity" (MT 72). It is the experience or feeling of bodily unity (MT 158). The human body provides the closest experience of the interplay of actualities in nature. How we experience our bodies is then a fundamental source of evidence for the elucidation of that interplay, transition, or process that characterizes all our experiencing (MT 159). To accept this statement is to grant that human experience embodies the generic features of reality. It is also to grant that "the 'objects' of experience are external things which are in some respect immanent in the subjective occasion of experiencing. "Unless that be so, there cannot . . . be a valid inference to a world of external things".<sup>13</sup> This is Whitehead's

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<sup>13</sup>Leclerc, op.cit., p. 121.

"reformed subjectivist principle".<sup>14</sup> It permits Whitehead to conclude that "the key notion from which [metaphysical] construction should start is that energetic activity considered in physics is the emotional intensity entertained in life" (MT 168). It now remains to examine in more detail the characteristics of experience in the mode of causal efficacy. Bodily experience is not primarily an experience of clear and distinct sense data.

The internal functioning of a healthy body provides singularly few sense data, primarily associated with itself. When such sense data appear, we send for a doctor. They are mostly aches and pains (MT 114).

The underlying necessities of animal experience are not discerned in its primary experiencing. The identification of the function of the internal organs requires a high degree of abstract thought. Yet the feeling of bodily unity is a primary experience. "It is an experience so habitual and so completely a matter of course that we rarely mention it. No one ever says, Here am I, and I have brought my body with me" (MT 114). The direct feeling of the derivation of emotion from the body is also a primary experience. This feeling is not a mere reflection on sense data. Emotional states of enjoyment arise from the sheer absence of sensa directly associated with parts of the body. We enjoy vision because there is no eyestrain. The sense of bodily well-being arises as "a positive feeling only casually associated with particular sensa" (MT 159). There is a basic feeling of the derivation or modification of mental and emotional experience from bodily functioning that is not sharply defined by sense data. This feeling

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See above, p. 25f.

of derivation is the basis for the conviction that there is a unity of body and mind. The body is a part of nature. So long as nature was conceived in Newtonian terms there was a sharp division between a material world conceived as bits of matter located at point instants and human experience. The elimination of this conception in favour of a view of the world as characterized by forms of transition makes it possible to construe the world in terms of activities disclosed in intimate experience (MT 115). The primary experience which precedes and is presupposed in sense perception is the experience of value.

Our enjoyment of actuality is a realization of worth, good or bad. It is a value experience. Its basic expression is--Have a care, here is something that matters! . . . the primary glimmering of consciousness reveals, something that matters (MT 116).

The primary characterizations of "that which matters" are "totality", "externality," and "internality". "There is the totality of actual fact; there is the externality of many facts; there is the internality of this experiencing which lies within the totality" (MT 116).

These three divisions are on a level. No one in any sense precedes the other. There is the whole fact containing within itself my fact and the other facts. Also the dim meaning of fact--or actuality--is intrinsic importance for itself, for the others, and for the whole (MT 117).

#### Religion in Whitehead's Account of Experience

Actuality is the self-enjoyment of importance, but that enjoyment includes the enjoyment of others and transitions towards the future. The most vivid example of this is the sense of the causal efficacy of our immediate past upon our immediate present and

its determination of our future. Actuality is in its essence composition and power is the compulsion of composition. To feel the contrast between the details of experienced reality and the totality of experiencing is to grasp the intuition of the holy.

When we survey nature and think however flitting and superficial has been the animal enjoyment of all its wonders, and when we realize how incapable the separate cells and pulsations of each flower are of enjoying the total effect--then our sense of the value of the details for the totality dawns upon our consciousness. This is the intuition of holiness, intuition of the sacred, which is the foundation of all religion (MT 120).

In essence Whitehead is pleading "that our whole experience is composed out of our relationships to the rest of things, and of the formation of new relationships constitutive of things to come" (MT 31).<sup>15</sup>

Whitehead identifies nonsensuous perception as that division of experience which mostly fully exhibits the underlying necessities of things. It follows that the sense of worth is central to actuality (MT 16). It is therefore meaningful to ask in what sense is there importance for the universe. There are grounds for postulating "a unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MT 4). Hence there are grounds for considering the possibility that religion is not devoid of objective validity. It is clear that if sense data is taken as the fundamental form of experience questions of worth and rational discernment of religious truth are excluded from the purview of philosophical

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<sup>15</sup>For Whitehead experience is "the 'self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many'" (PR 220). "The many become one, and are increased by one" (PR 32). This is what Charles Hartshorne terms Whitehead's "novel intuition". See the essay so-entitled in Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on his Philosophy, ed. G. L. Kline, (New Jersey, 1963), pp. 18-26.

consideration. Whitehead's conviction that nonsensuous perception is the primary mode of experience permits him to examine questions of value and questions concerning the rationality of religious conviction in a positive manner within the context of metaphysics. But the conclusion that nonsensuous perception is the fundamental mode of experience does not guarantee the objective validity of value experience in general or the universal validity of religious claims about particular value experiences. Nonsensuous perception suggests that process is a fundamental category for understanding actuality. But the notion of value or importance for the universe is unintelligible apart from some sort of notion of order in the universe.

Life on this planet depends on the order observed throughout the spatio-temporal stellar system, as disclosed in our experience. These special forms of order exhibit no final necessity whatsoever. . . . There is no necessity in their nature. But there is necessity that the importance of experience requires adequate stability of order (MT 87).

The overwhelming indications of order have to be explained along with the presence and disorder and the non-necessity of any particular form of order (MT 88).

#### Metaphysics and Whitehead's Account of Experience

One of the main implications of Whitehead's interpretation of experience is that "the notions of process and existence presuppose each other" (MT 96). Process cannot "be analyzed into compositions of final realities, themselves devoid of process" (MT 96). But at the same time process requires the notion of individuality.<sup>16</sup> "In separation

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<sup>16</sup>See Leclerc, op.cit., on Whitehead's "epochal theory of time", pp. 74-78.



all meaning evaporates" (MT 97). Process cannot be considered in abstraction from the individual things involved in the process.

It follows that no absolute generality of application can be ascribed to logic, mathematics, or induction. "The limitation of rationalism is the inescapable diversity" (MT 98). But the diversity is not absolute. The individuals are formative of the process, but the process affects the character of the individuals. "The actualities of the present are deriving their characters from the process, and are bestowing their characters upon the future" (MT 99). Induction is possible because the "form of process chiefly derives from the dominant facts involved and thence tends to sustain itself so as to govern realizations in its own future" (MT 100). But the problem remains of how to explain the means whereby a characterization or form dominating a process involves in its own nature "reference to the realization of other forms in other occasions" (MT 101).

#### 4. Philosophical Assemblage: Stage III

What Whitehead has attempted to do up to this point is set forth "generalized statements of the commonplaces of experience" (MT 101). What he is seeking to identify are the underlying necessities of existence. These are not found on the surface of daily experience. The variant not the invariant is what catches our attention and becomes the focal point of our verbalized communication.

We do not have to indicate for each other the necessities of existence. Language mainly presupposes the necessities and emphasizes the accidents. We rarely mention what must be present (MT 101).

The third stage in Whitehead's philosophical assemblage is a tentative

consideration of what the underlying necessities of existence are. It is only after the focus of attention has shifted from the commonplaces of experiences that the notion of God first arises in Whitehead's philosophical assemblage. In Whitehead's view the title of a book by Samuel Alexander, Space, Time and Deity, introduces three notions that serious reflection suggests are basic for any account of experienced actuality. It is most important to observe that these notions are reflective notions. They are not deliverances of immediate experience. Without time there is no historic process. Life and motion and therefore purpose are lost. Without space there is no actual attainment and accomplishment. Time and space are the prerequisites for transition and success of achievement.

Finally, there is deity, which is that factor in the universe whereby there is importance . . . beyond the actual. It is by reference of the spacial immediacies to the ideals of deity that the sense of worth beyond ourselves arises. The unity of a transcendent universe, and the multiplicity of realized actualities, both enter our experience by this sense of deity. Apart from this sense of transcendent worth, the otherness of reality would not enter into our consciousness (MT 102).

It is Whitehead's conviction that we experience a relationship to a universe other than ourselves and that "human experience explicitly relates itself to an external standard" (MT 103). This external standard could not arise unless the universe is "understood as including a source of ideals" (MT 103). This source of ideals means that "the form of process is not wholly dependent upon derivation from the past" (MT 103). The "deistic impulse of energy" (MT 104) provides novel forms of order and new ideals when "epochs decay amid futility and frustration" (MT 103).

It is the religious impulse in the world which transforms the dead facts of science into the living drama of history. For this reason science can never foretell the perpetual novelty of history (MT 104).

It is my contention that Whitehead's interpretation of philosophical assemblage incorporates more than a mere examination of the commonplaces of experience. It also involves a comparison of daily experience with our inherited ways of understanding it<sup>17</sup> together with an informal examination of what necessities must underlie these experiences.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore possible to interpret certain sections of Whitehead's book, Adventures of Ideas, as part of his contribution to philosophical assemblage. It is my suggestion that the second of the four parts of Adventures of Ideas may legitimately be considered as an exercise in philosophical assemblage. The question of an adequate systematic account of the underlying necessities of existence is raised and examined in the light of the more general cosmological and scientific ideas that have influenced Western thought. But in this section Whitehead refrains from setting forth his own working hypothesis. The third and fourth sections of this book clearly incorporate metaphysical notions that are derived from Whitehead's systematic thought. What these later sections suggest about the relation between religion and metaphysics will be dealt with in the context of the discussion of the systematic aspect of Whitehead's metaphysics.

The previous discussion has pointed out the importance of order

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<sup>17</sup>See above, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup>See above, p. 39.

for the realization of significant value experience and the presupposition of such order in all inductive reasoning.<sup>19</sup> The second section of Adventures of Ideas begins with an examination of the notion of "laws of nature" (AI 103). "Apart from a certain smoothness in the nature of things, there can be no knowledge, no useful method, no intelligent purpose. Lacking an element of Law, there remains a mere welter of details (AI 109). But an accurate expression of the notion of Law is extremely difficult. The extreme generality of the concept readily lends itself to misinterpretation of specific features of particular applications as generic features of the notion itself. From earliest times the reflective thought of man has expressed discernment of "the interweaving of law and capriciousness in the mystery of things" (AI III). "Sometimes the law is good and the capriciousness evil; sometimes the law is iron and evil and the capriciousness is merciful and good (AI III).

Whitehead suggests that there are four main doctrines concerning the laws of nature. These doctrines characterized law as immanent, imposed, descriptive, or simply conventional interpretation. The doctrine of law as immanent presupposes the essential interdependence of things and that the law is explanatory of the pattern in things and in their mutual relations. While law is explanatory exact confirmation to the law is not expected. It will have a statistical character. Since the laws of nature depend upon the individual character of things within nature as things change so does the law. Laws of nature evolve with the things constituting the environment. This interpretation permits a limited trust in induction for some knowledge of the laws of nature

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<sup>19</sup>See above, p.33.

dominating an environment is possible. The doctrine of law as immanent is only tenable if it can be demonstrated that "the characters of the relevant things in nature are the outcome of their interconnections, and their interconnections are the outcome of their characters" (AI 113).

The doctrine of law as imposed presupposes ultimate existents upon whom there is imposed the necessity of entering into relationships with other constituents of nature. These imposed patterns are the laws of nature. These imposed patterns cannot be discovered by any study of the interrelation of the self-subsistent entities. This doctrine supports and also suggests a form of Deism. It requires a correlative doctrine of a transcendent imposing deity. Since laws are divine commands it follows that they are exactly obeyed. Statistical notions are not applicable to ultimate imposed laws. Whitehead believes that the doctrine of imposition cannot be entirely dismissed. Historically it provided the conviction necessary for the search and discovery of definite laws beyond the limits of meticulous observation. The doctrine of immanence without the inclusion of some notion of imposition provides "absolutely no reason why the universe should not be steadily relapsing into lawless chaos" (AI 115).

The third interpretation is the doctrine of law as mere observed persistence of pattern throughout a series of observations. Law is understood as merely description. "The laws of nature are nothing else than the observed identities of pattern persisting throughout the series of comparative observations. Thus a law of nature says something about things observed and nothing more (AI 115). Certainly science does elucidate "observed correlations of observed fact" (AI 116). But this

doctrine which claims to confine philosophy to the given facts is "the one which can least bear confrontation with the facts" (AI 124). It provides no basis for induction whatsoever. As David Hume effectively demonstrated sense data do not reveal any evidence concerning their interconnection. In Whitehead's view scientists and philosophers simply use positivism to avoid metaphysics but at the same time defend the significance of science "by an implicit recurrence to their metaphysical persuasion that the past does in fact condition the future" (AI 125-126). Whitehead contends that speculative extension beyond direct observation requires "some trust in metaphysics, however vaguely these metaphysical notions may be entertained in explicit thought" (AI 128). The dissociation of science from metaphysics presupposed in this doctrine can be proved demonstrably false by the history of science.

The fourth interpretation is the doctrine of law as conventional interpretation. It emphasizes that systems of ideas are elaborated in detachment from any direct or detailed observation of matter of fact. Yet subsequently nature is interpreted in terms of these patterns. This doctrine holds "that nature is patient of interpretation in terms of laws which happen to interest us" (AI 136). The arbitrariness of choice of interpretation seems to be confirmed by the variety of geometries that are applicable to the same subject-matter. This is a misconception. It simply demonstrates that there are "diverse systems of relationship within the subject-matter, so related that if one be present then the others are present" (AI 136). While there are probably many abstract sciences with laws, regularities and theorems as yet undeveloped and while it is probably true that convention may determine what sciences are

developed this does not mean "that any facts of nature can be interpreted as illustrating any laws that we like to assign" (AI 138). Whitehead concludes that only some combination of the notions of law as immanent and imposed can do justice to the facts of experience and the actual practice of scientists. Immanence devoid of a transcendent element provides no reason why the universe should not continually relapse into chaos. The history of science and philosophy leads Whitehead to the conclusion that the effective agency in the transformation from medieval to contemporal science was largely developed apart from consideration of physical observation. The primary agent has been the development and co-ordination of theoretical constructions in mathematics (AI 155f.). The breakdown of Newtonian cosmology underlines for Whitehead the importance of developing imaginative possibilities as yet unutilized in the service of scientific explanation.

Systems come and go and each limited mode of understanding is at length exhausted. To claim dogmatic certainty for statements of ultimate generalities is sheer folly but to attack the endeavour to systematize is treason to civilization (AI 159, 162). Systems decay but new systems are not repudiations of earlier efforts. Rather they attempt to define more clearly the scope of earlier co-ordinations and set them within the perspective of wider truths. On the basis of these reflections Whitehead concludes that in dealing with the notion of laws of nature the metaphysician must take account of but need not confine himself to the theories underlying contemporary science. In attempting to combine the notions of law as immanent and as imposed Whitehead therefore feels at liberty to re-examine the teachings of Plato.

### A Suggestion From Theology

In Plato there appears the suggestion that the "degree of orderliness which the world exhibits" (AI 147) depends upon a transcendent element that is persuasive rather than a coercive agency. But Plato failed to co-ordinate this intuition with the rest of his metaphysical theory (AI 166).<sup>20</sup> The Alexandrian theologians "have the distinction of being the only thinkers who in a fundamental metaphysical doctrine have improved upon Plato" (AI 167). They adumbrated the doctrine that "the trend towards order does not arise from the imposed will of a transcendent God. It arises from the fact, that the existents in nature are sharing in the nature of the immanent God" (AI 130). While these theologians did not develop a general metaphysics they pointed to a means whereby Platonic metaphysics could be modified to provide "a rational account of the role of the persuasive agency of God" (AI 169).

This is the second reference to the notion of God to arise within the confines of a discussion of philosophical assemblage in Whitehead. In both instances it is introduced as a reflective notion required to account for the degree of stability discerned in the physical universe. In another context Whitehead makes explicit his conclusion that not only within metaphysics but also within religion, insofar as it is rational, God is introduced at the level of reflection. He sharply rejects the introduction of God as an object of experience rather than an inference from experience. He also suggests that Christian theology has been fairly

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<sup>20</sup>In Whitehead's view "Plato always failed in his attempts at systematization, and always succeeded in displaying depth of metaphysical intuition---the greatest metaphysician, the poorest systematic thinker" (AI 166).



consistent in its adherence to this position (RM 64). It is important to note that within philosophical assemblage neither God nor religion are granted a special status. Religion is introduced as a genuine modality of human experience but it is a sub-species of value-experience. "God" is introduced as a reflective notion required for a rational account of experience. "God" does not denote the logical subject of a particular religious intuition. God is introduced as a metaphysical concept and the question of how this concept is to be understood and whether it refers to anything real can only be answered on the basis of metaphysical considerations. This does not mean, of course, that there can be no God until there is a systematic metaphysics. It means that there can be no clear reflective account of God apart from a fully developed systematic metaphysics.

### 5. Summary

In this first section I have attempted to examine how religion emerges within Whitehead's metaphysical endeavour in some disengagement from the implications of his systematic formulations. This survey of how religion emerges within the context of philosophical assemblage makes clear that for Whitehead the question of the objectivity of religious conclusions is contingent upon the validity of its metaphysical presuppositions. In Whitehead's view the fundamental move for the determination of the relation between metaphysics and religion is a metaphysical decision as to what aspect of experience most fully exhibits the universal necessities of existence. This decision must be made on the basis of metaphysical considerations and not upon the basis of special religious considerations.<sup>21</sup> For Whitehead process is

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<sup>21</sup>See above, p.30.

a fundamental category underlying all experience. Given the foundational nature of process order must be explained. But order need not presuppose a universe governed by necessary and static laws. Science discerns not transition of static forms but forms of transition. Whitehead identifies nonsensuous perception as that division of experience which most fully exhibits the underlying necessities of things. The sense of worth then becomes central to actuality and questions concerning the rationality of religion may be examined in a positive manner within the context of metaphysics. The success of this tentative formulation rests upon providing an adequate, coherent, systematic account of the underlying necessities of existence. A reflection upon the history of ideas suggests to Whitehead that successful execution of this metaphysics will require a notion of law that combines elements of transcendence and immanence and that Plato's notion of the persuasive agency of God as modified by the Alexandrian theologians provides the best clue for development of a rational explanation of the stability of the experienced world that is conjoined with the continuing frustration of order and the absence of necessity in any particular form of order.

The next section turns to an examination of how religion emerges within the systematic aspects of Whitehead's metaphysical endeavour.

#### 6. Religion and Metaphysical Systematization

In the preceding section it was noted that determination of what are the broad generalities underlying existence and what aspects of experience most fully exhibit them are questions to be adjudicated on the basis of metaphysical criteria. It was emphasized that this decision which determines the very possibility of incorporating "the

final values of existence" (AI 118) within the sphere of reflective thought is to be made on the basis of evidence derived from the experience of men in general and not upon the basis of special religious evidence. The aim of this section is to examine the general structure of Whitehead's speculative metaphysics. More particularly, attention is focussed upon how God is introduced into speculative metaphysics and whether it compromises Whitehead's dictum that such decisions are not to be made on the basis of special religious evidence. This section terminates with a consideration of the importance of religious inquiry as an adjunct to metaphysical inquiry.

### The Structure of Speculative Metaphysics

We have already seen that for Whitehead metaphysics cannot begin with systematization.<sup>22</sup> But he recognizes that there can be no substantial progress in metaphysics without production of theories that dictate the relevance of evidence. Without a theory there is no criterion for the evaluation of evidence beyond separate appeals to experience in each instance. A theory has the status of a working hypothesis. A useful analysis of a theory does not begin with the question, true or false, but rather with an exploration of the scope of useful application of a theory and its failure beyond that scope (AI 221).

The requirements for an adequate metaphysical scheme or theory are rigorous. Adequacy is not restricted to such items as happen to have been considered. Adequacy means that no item of experience may be found incapable of interpretation in terms of the scheme. The scheme

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<sup>22</sup> See page 13.

is formulated through imaginative generalization and rationalism (PR 7). There is no simple path either of deduction or inductive generalization from the conclusions of philosophical assemblage to the statements of the categorical scheme. The scheme consists of definitions of concepts, not propositions about the world.<sup>23</sup> To interpret the world in terms of the concepts of the scheme derivative notions must be introduced. The scheme itself consists of analytical statements of relationships within the constructed scheme. The scheme is used to provide an interpretation of what is learned from experience. We learn from experience that some things endure through time. The categorical scheme does not presuppose that this is necessarily so. But it can be used "to interpret the contingent fact that there are enduring things".<sup>24</sup>

It is important to distinguish between Whitehead's categoreal scheme and a cosmology. The former is a description of the abstract generic features of any and all possible worlds. The latter is a description of this particular (logically contingent and arbitrary) world. While the world we experience must be no exception to the general principles if these principles are indeed generic, it is to be expected that a world will illustrate them in a unique manner. For this reason the categoreal scheme leaves room for and gives very general rules for the formation of non-categoreal systematic statements that interpret de facto features that obtain in the present cosmic epoch. Thus derivative notions are introduced when the categoreal scheme is used

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<sup>23</sup> Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", Ivor Leclerc (ed.) The Relevance of Whitehead (London, 1961), p. 75f.

<sup>24</sup> Christian, "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion", William Reese and Eugene Freeman (ed.) Process and Divinity (Illinois, 1964), p. 186.

to develop a cosmology to interpret the facts of experience.

### The Introduction of God

Whitehead introduces the concept of God as a derivative notion. In this instance Whitehead does not begin with a common fact of direct experience but rather with a problem. He has used the categorical scheme to interpret succession in terms of actual entities that have temporal beginnings and endings. But actual entities are processes of self-creation that must have a final cause inherent within them. The actual entity embodies a "decision" or a "subjective aim" (PR 224) as to what sort of entity it will make itself. But there is not first a subject and then an aim. The problem is how can the subjective aim of a temporal actual entity originate? The scheme requires that actual entities be the only reasons. If unrealized possibilities are to have relevance to the formation of novel temporal actual entities then these possibilities to be relevant must reside within the constitution of a primordial and everlasting actual entity. The scheme also requires that there be only one such non-derivative actuality (PR 48). This actuality Whitehead terms God. He uses this denotation "because the contemplation of our natures, as enjoying real feelings derived from the timeless source of all order, acquires that 'subjective form' of refreshment and companionship at which religions aim" (PR 47). Whitehead does not use religious experience as the basis for the introduction of the notion of God. In appealing to experience for the introduction of derivative notions Whitehead restricts himself "to common and public facts".<sup>25</sup> But clearly he regards religious experience as genuine.

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<sup>25</sup>Christian, "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion," op.cit., p. 183.

"God" is primarily a religious term; an essential feature of religious experience is a sense of "refreshment and companionship"; apprehension of the primordial and everlasting actual entity generates these qualities; hence it is justifiable to call it "God".<sup>26</sup>

God is introduced "as an explanation of an interpretation. It gives an explanation of the concept of a temporal actual entity, which is itself used to interpret the fact of successiveness".<sup>27</sup>

In the categoreal scheme there are no direct references to the world as experienced. While religious experience and various other types of experience may have inspired the scheme it does not logically presuppose them. The scheme is used to analyze and interpret our experience. Statements which perform this function are postsystematic. A successful speculative scheme permits us at the postsystematic level to express in a coherent way the various elements of our experience and their relations to each other. The scheme is meant to be applicable not only to established scientific theories but also to concrete perceptual experiences as well as moral, aesthetic and religious intuitions. It must provide an adequate explanation of all aspects of experience. The metaphysical endeavour involves exploration in two directions. There is a nonsystematic exploration of the underlying and constant features of experience and there is an exploration of the resources of the categorical scheme to provide an adequate as well as coherent account of the facts of experience. A somewhat dialectical process is involved. "To look at the fact in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 189. Cf. also Charles Hartshorne's article entitled "Whitehead's Idea of God" in The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Chicago, 1941), pp. 513-559.

the light of the scheme is to re-examine the fact"<sup>28</sup> It calls for a decision as to whether particular postsystematic statements are an adequate interpretation of the presystematic facts. A negative decision means that while the scheme may remain highly comprehensive it fails as an adequate metaphysical account. Even if the scheme is judged adequate in accounting for all the facts we have considered, it does not seem possible to make a final judgment of the truth of the scheme. "We never can be in a position to say that we have considered all the facts."<sup>29</sup>

In this study attention is being directed to the question of the relation of religious inquiry to metaphysical inquiry. In the present section an analysis has been offered as to how the term "God" emerges within that form of reflective reason termed "speculative metaphysics". It is clear that at the level of reflective analysis a clear conception of God arises at a late stage in the process of cerebration. It is in Christian's words "an explanation of an interpretation".<sup>30</sup> "God" is an explanation of the concept "primordial and everlasting actual entity" which in turn provides an interpretation whereby the notion of temporal actual entities can be rationally accounted for. What should not be forgotten is that cerebration itself is a late arrival upon the scene and that even within human experience it is a transient phenomena that is overwhelmed much of the time by sleep, sickness and indifference to reflection (MT 112). In Whitehead's view it is not the primary mode whereby we experience the universe around

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<sup>28</sup> Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", op.cit., p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>30</sup> Christian, "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion", op.cit., p.189.

and within us. It but brings to self-awareness an already present interconnectedness of the experiencing subject and the world he experiences. If the concept "God" has any relevance to experience as interpreted by Whitehead then God is "felt" by creatures in a more fundamental mode of experiencing at all times regardless of whether or not that experience is brought to self-conscious reflective analysis.

In his analysis of Whitehead's system Christian makes clear that he is attending strictly to the logical structure of that system. He notes that Whitehead uses aesthetic experience as a paradigm for his theory of actual entities but experience is not strictly speaking a systematic term. He does introduce the notion of "feeling" but "'feeling' is defined as a prehension; a prehension is not defined as a feeling."<sup>31</sup> The movement of thought is toward abstraction. "We should not read into his systematic terms stronger meanings than they are given in the categoreal scheme."<sup>32</sup> It is legitimate to ask whether the scheme is adequate to aesthetic experiences. The fact that Whitehead takes aesthetic experience as a paradigm does not guarantee that the constructed scheme is applicable and adequate to interpret all aesthetic experience. Whitehead's scheme assumes that there is a plurality of things comprising the universe none of which is absolutely unconnected with everything else. There is nothing entirely beyond our experience. This is what justifies construction of a categoreal scheme rather than a mere listing of existents. This supposition of interconnectedness permits

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<sup>31</sup>Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 83f.



discussion of integrated values inhering in the universe and of a logical harmony of being. Christian argues that "the supposition that all things are interconnected in some systematic way does not . . . justify . . . saying there is a harmony of being in some other and stronger sense. Yet it is clear Whitehead does go further".<sup>33</sup> In the final sections of both Process and Reality and Adventures of Ideas this harmony is identified as the basis of morality and the object of religious experience.<sup>34</sup> The question to be considered is what is the precise nature of this going beyond mere logical harmony. Hartshorne has observed that

logic construes our concepts, not our intuitions. In the step from intuitions to conceptual formulae is where . . . differences lie . . . . All philosophy must be more than just logic. But . . . it seems to be an unsolved problem how completely logic can be purified of intuitive elements.<sup>35</sup>

In the final chapter attention will be directed again to this quandary. It is Christian's suggestion that together with a speculative question as to the nature of things Whitehead is asking a basic religious question, namely, "What is the (ultimate) source of refreshment and companionship?"<sup>36</sup> Whitehead presupposes that there is such a source, according to Christian's account. The analysis of Whitehead's religious inquiry that comprises the next chapter confirms this conclusion.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Hartshorne, "Interrogation of Charles Hartshorne", Philosophical Interrogations, ed. Sydney and Beatrice Rome (New York, 1964), p. 348.

<sup>36</sup> Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", op.cit., p. 86.

### The Logical Status of the Concept "God"

Christian states that the concept of God in Whitehead's philosophy both permits and requires systematic references. By reference he means "an answer to a question of the form: 'What do you mean by M?' when M has been used to stand for the logical subject of some proposition".<sup>37</sup> In Whitehead's philosophy a systematic answer can be given to the question, "What do you mean by God?" To answer such a question systematically is to give meaning and interpretation to the term by reference to the elements of an explicitly elaborated categorical scheme. According to the norms of Whitehead's metaphysics any meaningful nonsystematic expression must be interpretable in systematic terms. "The concept of God in Whitehead's philosophy is categorically contingent, systematically necessary, and existentially contingent."<sup>38</sup> This requires explication. If the proposition "God exists" is true, it is contingently not necessarily true. It is a conclusion which follows from the initial claim that the real world is made up of temporal actual entities. But the claim that real things have temporal beginnings is not characterized by Whitehead as a necessary truth. It is not deduced from premises which are thought to be clear and indubitable. Indeed Whitehead does not believe that such premises are available for speculative philosophy. He does not claim alternative understandings of the nature of things are absurd but rather that his philosophy is superior to the major alternatives. Hence

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<sup>37</sup>Christian, "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion", op.cit., p. 191.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

conclusions derived from his starting-point are to be taken as contingent in the sense just now explained.<sup>39</sup>

While the concept of God is existentially contingent this does not mean that God exists contingently. In two senses God is understood by Whitehead as a being who exists necessarily. God has no temporal beginning or end and is effectively relevant everywhere at all times. God is an essential condition of the existence of any actual entity that has a temporal beginning. Since all actual entities but God have temporal beginnings, if any actuality exists, God exists. God is conceived as a necessary being. But the existential truth of the concept depends "not only on the consistency and coherence of Whitehead's system but also on its adequacy",<sup>40</sup> and its adequacy remains existentially contingent. The important aspect of Christian's analysis of Whitehead for present purposes is his conclusion that in terms of the internal logical structure of the system, God is a derivative concept permitted but not required by the categoreal scheme. If man's experience were different from what it is in a fundamental sense, for example, if there were no experience of things coming into being and perishing, then different derivative concepts would be needed in order to make the categoreal scheme applicable. Not only is God a derivative notion the denotation by the cognomen God is a further interpretation of the notion. God is an interpretation of the concept "primordial and everlasting actual entity". It is important to observe that religious experience

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

is not the basis for the introduction of the notion of God in any direct sense. The interpretation of common and public facts requires Whitehead to posit a timeless source of all order and novelty. Logically this is a rather difficult step. An adequate interpretation of the contingent facts of existence requires the notion of something that is a necessary ingredient in all experience. This something is a timeless source of all order and novelty. The further explanation that this timeless source of all order and novelty is God involves Whitehead<sup>41</sup> in an assessment of the meaning of God in a religious usage. It requires Whitehead to present and defend a theory of religion that identifies essential features of God in the religious context with the features of the primordial, non-temporal actual entity posited in his systematic metaphysical account and explanation of the experience of temporal succession.

#### Religious Inquiry as an Adjunct to Metaphysical Inquiry

Whitehead's introduction of God into his metaphysics suggests that at least part of what is meant by God in the religious context is identical with what is meant in the metaphysical context by the timeless source of all order and novelty. It also suggests that the notion God has more than a peculiarly religious significance. Whitehead makes this explicit. "The secularization of the concept of God's functions in the world is at least as urgent a requisite of thought as is the secularization of other elements in experience. The concept of God is certainly one

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<sup>41</sup> While this is correct it may be misleading. For Whitehead God is in one sense non-temporal and in another sense temporal. It is probably correct to suggest that God for Whitehead is only "timeless"

essential element in religious feeling. But the converse is not true; the concept of religious feeling is not an essential element in the concept of God's function in the universe . . ."(PR 315-316). This passage calls forth two different but related questions. While it demonstrates that for Whitehead the notion of God has more than religious significance, it by no means provides an adequate clarification of what Whitehead means by religious significance. It might seem to suggest that whatever in religion is not metaphysics is simply a species of emotion. R. Das and Victor Lowe have concluded that this is indeed Whitehead's position.<sup>42</sup> In the chapters that follow Whitehead's analysis of religion will be considered and it will be argued that the conclusion reached by Das and Lowe is a misleading simplification of Whitehead's subtle understanding of religious inquiry. From the standpoint of metaphysical inquiry this passage raises a different question. If God is a notion fundamental to metaphysical construction yet derived from religion, it suggests that religious experience is in some sense a genuine modality of human experiencing and that it is a significant contributor to metaphysics. It has already been shown that at the level of philosophical assemblage Whitehead also concludes that religion contributes significantly to metaphysical construction.<sup>43</sup> If religious experience is used as a source of evidence for metaphysics, it presupposes an explication of what experiences are religious and if those experiences yield conflicting evidence it presupposes a means whereby

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from the standpoint of his primordial nature. Cf. Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead's Idea of God", op.cit., pp. 541ff.

<sup>42</sup>Victor Lowe, Understanding Whitehead (Baltimore, 1966), p. 95.

<sup>43</sup>See above, p. 46.

to adjudicate the relevance of evidence. It follows that a metaphysics that incorporates religious evidence as relevant to its constructive endeavour must adopt or develop a general theory of religion in order to demonstrate that its selection of evidence has not been arbitrary and has not compromised the generality of application that is inseparable from the metaphysical goal which is to provide an adequate interpretation of every element of experience in terms of a "coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas" (PR 4). Therefore Whitehead's metaphysics invites and requires a general account of religion as an adjunct to its constructive endeavour. For example it is not clear that all religions provide evidence for the reality of God as understood in Whitehead's metaphysics. Some religions are theistic, some agnostic and some atheistic. Whitehead's use of the term "God" invites a clarification of the normative grounds for adjudicating the relevance of religious evidence to metaphysical inquiry. It may seem to the reader that, with the introduction of religious evidence, the circularity inherent in metaphysics cannot fail to become vicious. Metaphysics is the final arbiter of truth in religion yet metaphysics adopts suggestions from religion as to what sorts of things there are and as to what is the character inherent in the universe. It is the task of the next two chapters to demonstrate that the generality of Whitehead's metaphysics is not compromised by the introduction of peculiarly religious evidence and that the openness of his religious inquiry is not compromised by the introduction of his own metaphysics as a basis of adjudication of the metaphysical presuppositions of divergent world religions.

## 7. Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to examine in some detail how religion emerges as a factor within metaphysics both at the level of philosophical assemblage and at the level of imaginative systematic construction. It was discovered that for Whitehead religion is defined as a "unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MF 28). It is clear that the necessary, if not sufficient condition, for affirming the objective validity of religion is a metaphysical justification of the premise that value experience is reflective not merely of the directed activity of mankind but of the very nature of the universe. The justification of this premise is to be made strictly on the basis of metaphysical considerations and not upon the basis of special religious considerations. It was observed that it is only when attention has shifted from the commonplaces of experience to a reflection upon what necessities must underlie these experiences that the notion of God first arises in Whitehead's metaphysics. A reflection upon the history of ideas suggests to Whitehead that Plato's notion of the persuasive agency of God as modified by the Alexandrian theologians provides the best clue for development of a rational explanation of the stability of the experienced world that is conjoined with the continuing frustration of order and the absence of necessity in any particular form of order. It is a conception that accounts not only for order but also for the emergence of novelty. In Whitehead's systematic metaphysical construction God is again introduced as a reflective notion required for a rational account of experience. God is introduced as a metaphysical concept and the question of how this

concept is to be understood and whether it refers to anything real can only be answered on the basis of metaphysical considerations. This does not mean, of course, that there can be no God until there is a systematic metaphysics. It means that there can be no clear reflective account or experience of God apart from a fully developed systematic metaphysics. It was further observed that in Whitehead's systematic metaphysics God is introduced as a derivative notion and that it requires two forms of supportive evidence. God is an explanation of the notion "primordial and everlasting actual entity". The evidence for the necessity of a "primordial and everlasting actual entity" is the evidence that real things have temporal beginnings. But the identification of this notion with what is termed "God" in religious traditions requires the presentation of a theory of religion that identifies essential features of God in the religious context with the notion of a "primordial and everlasting actual entity". This identification requires Whitehead to engage in a general religious inquiry as an adjunct to his metaphysical inquiry.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

In the preceding chapter reasons have been offered as to why Whitehead's metaphysics requires him to engage to some degree in a religious inquiry. The aim of the present chapter is to investigate the nature and logical structure of Whitehead's religious inquiry, the status of the question of God within it, and the relationship of religious inquiry to metaphysics. The ultimate goal is to examine in detail the nature and degree of independence his religious inquiry has from the metaphysical inquiry. In order to understand Whitehead's thought on this subject it is necessary first to understand (1) the nature of his interest in religion, (2) how for him religious questions differ from metaphysical questions, (3) whether religious questions in his view differ from each other in logical status, (4) the manner in which metaphysics enters into the structure of religious inquiry and (5) the degree to which metaphysics determines the range of religious answers. This last question is the starting-point for the chapter that follows.

#### 1. Whitehead's Interest in Religion

The sources of evidence for the nature of Whitehead's interest in religion are scattered throughout his later writings. Despite the diversity of contexts a common characteristic of these references is their generality. Nowhere can Whitehead's interest in religion be defined in terms of the outlook of a particular religious community or its specific doctrines. Perhaps the most convincing implicit evidence as to

the generality of his interest is his usage of the word "religion" in the majority of references as opposed to more specific denotations. Explicit evidence of the generality of Whitehead's religious interest is found in numerous passages. At the termination of PR he indicates that his investigation of the nature of God is made "apart from any reference to existing religions as they are, or as they ought to be" (PR 521). In AI he argues that "if dogmatic finality of verbal expression is a mistaken notion" then religions should learn and borrow from each other in order to improve their "common modes of procedure" (AI 172). For Whitehead the goal of religion is not parochial. "It should be the common basis for the unity of civilization (AI 172). Throughout RM there is an insistence that his consideration of religion is directed toward a discernment of general truths rather than specific doctrines (RM 14). He wishes to delineate a religious consciousness that is universal rather than tribal or social (RM 48, 57, 63). Attention is directed to evidence "with a certain breadth of extension throughout mankind" (RM 107).

The evidence for the general nature of Whitehead's religious inquiry provides evidence for two corollaries. The first corollary is that Whitehead is interested in religion in terms of its universality "because it is either that or a passing fancy" (RM 133). Without a widespread basis of agreement religion loses its objectivity. Emotion supersedes reason and "then you can prove anything, except to reasonable people" (RM 63). In examining religion he seeks that general coherence that is "denied to hysteria" (RM 63). Universality and rational coherence are not only requirements of "reasonable people". It is

integral to the religious quest itself that an adequate answer must be a universal answer (RM 58f.). The second corollary is that it is clearly not Whitehead's intention to prejudge the relevance of one religious answer. He criticizes both Christianity and Buddhism for sheltering themselves "instead of looking to each other" for insights that would bring forth "deeper meanings" (RM, 141). He warns repeatedly that "dogmas, however true, are only bits of truth" (RM 139). The fundamental position of that inquiry Whitehead denotes by the term "religion" is "that we know more than can be formulated in one finite systematized scheme of abstractions, however important that scheme may be in the elucidation of some aspect of the order of things" (RM, 137). Two suppositions underlie Whitehead's religious inquiry. (1) From the standpoint of the religious believer as well as from the standpoint of the metaphysician religion can only be true if its truths are universal in application. (2) Religions can learn from each other in terms of modes of procedure in seeking religious truth.

## 2. Religious Questions

An inquiry is defined by the questions it addresses. While the questions Whitehead addresses are relatively clear, what those questions presuppose and how those questions are related to one another is much less clear. William Christian has provided some useful insights into religious inquiry that can be used as heuristic tools to elucidate both the structure and intention of Whitehead's religious inquiry. He distinguishes doctrinal questions from basic religious questions. Doctrinal questions "arise primarily within some more or less organized religious community and are concerned with what shall

be taught in that community".<sup>1</sup> "Argument about some doctrine can go on significantly only within the community whose faith the doctrine expresses."<sup>2</sup> Only the community can establish rules of relevance in doctrinal arguments. The following are examples of the doctrinal types of questions:

- a) Are the persons of the Trinity separable?
- b) Is Brahman alone in the universe?
- c) Are ex cathedra statements infallible?

An answer to a doctrinal question elucidates the internal logic of a particular religious scheme and how its various statements are interconnected. But not all religious questions are of this type. Questions may be raised as to what is the point of a doctrinal scheme or what it is that it seeks to assert. It is particularly appropriate to a general religious inquiry to frame questions of this type, "questions to which various doctrinal schemes, epitomized in basic religious proposals, might be taken as relevant answers".<sup>3</sup> These are what Christian calls basic religious questions. The following are examples:

- d) What is worthy of worship?
- e) What is the ultimate source of the value and meaning of existence?
- f) What is the holy?
- g) What is the ultimate source of order in the universe?

<sup>1</sup>William Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", op.cit., p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Christian, Meaning and Truth in Religion, op.-cit., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

To formulate such questions it is necessary to identify predicates that are capable"of being applied to (though not true of) more than one"<sup>4</sup>logical subject. These logical subjects to which the predicates must apply are those having central positions in the major religious traditions. The predicate must be formulated so that "its application is not restricted, a priori, to some one logical subject only".<sup>5</sup> The predicate characterizes a class of objects, "any one of which might be taken as the religious object without absurdity".<sup>6</sup> An acquaintance with the phenomenology of religion is a necessary first step in constructing such predicates.

It now remains to clarify the nature of the relationship between doctrinal and basic religious questions. The answer to a doctrinal question presupposes an answer to a basic religious question. It expands and explains some answer to a basic religious question in a systematic manner. A doctrine attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths discerned in the basic religious proposal it presupposes.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to a doctrinal question a basic religious question does not presuppose the superior relevance of one among several traditions as an adequate answer. It invites consideration of a variety of proposals as relevant answers to the question. If the question is basic, then it cannot be framed in such a way that its application is restricted a priori to some one logical subject only. The term "a priori" has been used

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<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", op. cit., p. 48f.

advisedly. Christian suggests that a notable feature of religious inquiry is that it demands a unique religious object. There cannot be two adequate answers to a basic religious question.<sup>8</sup> Christian suggests one further criterion for basic religious questions. It is that the predicates of these questions must apply "directly to the religious object, not to the religious person as an experiencing subject".<sup>9</sup> What is sought is the essence of religion not the characterization of religious states. The religious inquiry is not without pre-suppositions. It presumes that there is something which is the logical subject of basic religious predicates.

It has already been broadly hinted that Whitehead is engaged in a general religious inquiry whose purpose is (1) to identify "the domain of religious activity in human life"<sup>10</sup> and (2) to present an analysis of religious inquiry itself. There can be little doubt as to what for Whitehead comprises "the religious domain". In his philosophical assemblage he identifies religion as a sub-species of the genus "importance". In Religion in the Making he states: "the peculiar character of religious truth is that it explicitly deals with values . . . . It . . . provides a meaning, in terms of value, for our own existence, a meaning, which flows from the nature of things" (RM 120). Not all value questions are religious questions. A notable feature of Whitehead's account is that the religious domain is effectively distinguished even

<sup>8</sup>Christian, Meaning and Truth in Religion, op. cit., p. 61f.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

from the domain of moral questions. Whereas "morality emphasizes the detailed occasion religion emphasizes the unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MT 28). But it is impossible to affirm "an ideal inherent in the universe" apart from a decision as to what are the broad generalities underlying existence. It has already been pointed out<sup>11</sup> that for Whitehead the decision as to what are the broad generalities underlying existence is to be made on the basis of metaphysical considerations and not upon the basis of special religious considerations. It happens that Whitehead's metaphysical analysis does provide grounds for postulating "a unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MT 28). Given that metaphysics determines whether the basic religious question is meaningful, it might be asked: What is the point of religious inquiry? The point is two-fold and bears repetition.

(1) Religious inquiry determines what question is basic. (2) Religious inquiry assesses what answers are relevant and what answer is most nearly adequate to the basic religious question.

### 3. How Religious Questions Differ from Metaphysical Questions

It has just been observed that for Whitehead religious questions are value questions. Specifically the question concerns "the value, for its own sake, of the totality of historic fact in respect to its essential unity" the awareness of which is "the intuition of the sacred, which is at the foundation of all religion" (MT 119f.). A review of what has already been said indicates that for Whitehead the starting-point for metaphysical inquiry is not a question about value. Metaphysics

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<sup>11</sup>See page 30.

is "the endeavour to frame a coherent logical, necessary system in terms of which every element in our experience can be interpreted" (PR 4). It seeks to display all of the self-evidence "concerning the nature of things and their connection" (MT 48). The question addressed in the metaphysical inquiry is: What sorts of things are there and how are they interconnected? Whitehead's metaphysics seeks to discern an essential unity in things, but it does not presuppose that the unity to be discerned is a unity of value. As set forth by Whitehead religious inquiry presupposes a unity of value; metaphysics does not. If Whitehead has in fact found a unity of value, it is a conclusion and not the starting-point of his metaphysics.

#### 4. Whitehead's Religious Inquiry

I have identified in Whitehead what Christian would call a basic religious question, namely, "What is the ideal inherent in the universe?" In section 1 of this chapter it was argued that it is not Whitehead's intention to prejudge the relevance of one religious answer. While the precise nature of the relation of metaphysics to religion has yet to be determined, it has been shown that basic religious questions differ from basic metaphysical questions in Whitehead's thought. There is at least a prima facie case that Whitehead is engaged in an investigation whose purpose is not to prejudge the adequacy of one religious answer but to analyze the religious inquiry itself, particularly the basic question it addresses and the relation of religious inquiry to metaphysical inquiry.

Whitehead's systematic discussion of religion begins with a



genetic account that stresses its origin in ritual and myth and its function in primitive society as a cohesive social force and emotional bond between individuals. But he does not identify the essence of religion with its starting-point. On the contrary the purpose of his account is to argue that "the heart of religious importance" is not discerned until beliefs have been well-established and there is an "adjustment of these beliefs into a system, internally coherent and coherent with other beliefs" (RM 18). In short he is presenting a developmental argument to support his contention that religion at its height "is religion whose beliefs and rituals have been reorganized with the aim of making it the central element in a coherent ordering of life" (RM 30). He is excusing in advance the presentation of a theory of religion applicable only to religions "who have rationalized their outlook" (RM 65). It is outside the scope of the present study to consider the merits of Whitehead's genetic account judged by anthropological criteria. It is not possible to consider Whitehead's claim that the only truthful way for man to speak of reality and the universe is in conformity with the principles of rationality or to consider Whitehead's understanding of the impact of history upon the foundations of rationality itself. For the present study it is sufficient to note that Whitehead's concern is focussed upon what he calls "rational religion" and that his analysis of it is not inextricably tied to the genetic account he proposes. "Theoretically, rational religion could have risen in complete independence of the antecedent social religions and mythical beliefs"(RM 31-32). That Whitehead's analysis of religious inquiry is limited to "rational religion" does not argue against its significance

as a general theory. There is no reason to prescribe a single theory of religion. It should be assessed in terms of the way it is to be used. If, as I have claimed, Whitehead is elucidating the relation of religion to metaphysics, it is most appropriate that he should restrict himself to religions that have "rationalized their outlook" (RM 65).

It must be emphasized that Whitehead is restricting himself to the consideration of rational religions. The presupposition underlying both his metaphysical and religious inquiry is made explicit. It is a "trust in the ultimate power of reason as a discipline for the discernment of truth" (RM 74). What is under consideration here is not the validity of that supposition. What is sought is a clarification of the relation of a metaphysical and religious inquiry when both accept that presupposition. Two points of clarification must be noted. For Whitehead the phrase "rational religion" in no way implies that the source of religion is ratiocination. Whitehead asserts that "religions commit suicide when they find their inspiration in their dogmas. The inspiration of religion lies in the history of religion" (RM 38). Whitehead characterizes high religion as "that metaphysics which can be derived from the supernormal experience of mankind in its moments of finest insight" (RM 31). The truths discerned in the particular moment of insight "are amplified into a coherent system and applied to the interpretation of life. They stand or fall--like other truths--by their success in this interpretation" (RM 120). At the same time Whitehead holds that the full meaning of an intuition need not be funded into one set of logical propositions. For example, "we know more of the characters of those who are dear to us than we can express accurately in words" (RM 123). The second point to

be noted is that it is not customary to distinguish sharply between the phenomenological evidence relevant for Whitehead's genetic account and the phenomenological evidence relevant for his analysis of religious inquiry.<sup>12</sup> But it is clear that Whitehead himself insists on this demarcation. He explicitly excludes evidence "from unrationalized religions [as] . . . not to the point" (RM 64) and he explicitly acknowledges the relevance of evidence from those religions who have rationalized their outlook. He identifies Buddhism and Christianity as "the two main rational religions" (RM 42).

#### 5. Whitehead's Analysis of Religious Inquiry

In RM Whitehead consistently follows the procedure of starting chapters with a phenomenological survey and a commentary upon evidence whose relevance is not made clear until the termination of a theoretical discussion that follows it. It is these theoretical discussions that will now receive close consideration. On the basis of evidence derived from Buddhism and Christianity Whitehead offers a definition of the general character of what he indiscriminately calls "religious experience", the point of origin of rational religion" and "the moment of religious consciousness" (RM 57-60). This starting-point is not a question but an experience that provokes a question. It is the experience of solitariness (RM 58).

The great religious conceptions which haunt the  
imagination of civilized mankind are scenes of

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<sup>12</sup>For an example of the failure to make this distinction clear, see David Hall, "The Autonomy of Religion in Whitehead's Philosophy", Philosophy Today, vol. 13, Winter 1969, pp. 272-273.

solitariness: Prometheus chained to his rock,  
 Mahomet brooding in the desert, the meditations  
 of the Buddha, the solitary Man on the Cross.  
 It belongs to the depth of the religious spirit  
 to have felt forsaken, even by God (RM 19).

. . . . .

In its solitariness the spirit asks, What in the  
 way of value is the attainment of life? (RM 59).

Whitehead is not trying to reduce all religious greatness to the  
 declaration, "Be Solitary!" He is arguing that religion is a response  
 to a question of individual worth that can only arise to-gether with  
 a consciousness of the separateness and aloneness of the phenomenological  
 self (RM 16). His argument that this is the starting-point of religious  
 inquiry does not presuppose that religion must affirm the ultimate value  
 of the individual self. Buddhism is used as evidence for his argument  
 but Whitehead interprets Buddhism as a negative answer to the question of  
 the ultimate value of the individual self (RM 49). The initial religious  
 question for Whitehead is "What in the way of value is the attainment  
 of life?" In Whitehead's view this question cannot be answered apart  
 from the question of what value inheres in the universe itself. The  
 answer to the question of individual worth is tied to the question of  
 the value of the universe. "Religion is world-loyalty" (RM 59). Earlier  
 in this study it was noted that Whitehead argues that there is no  
 realization of value apart from some basis of order.<sup>13</sup> "Mere disorder  
 results in nonentity of achievement" (MT 75). The question of the ultimate  
 value of the universe and of the individual must be answered in terms of  
 "an apprehension of character permanently inherent in the nature of things"(RM 60).

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See page 32.

Using Christian's terminology<sup>14</sup> the basic religious question for Whitehead is "What is the 'character of permanent rightness' (RM 60) inherent in the nature of things?" or alternatively "What is the unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MT 28) ?"

A proposed answer to the basic religious question yields:

three allied concepts . . . whose separate relationships to fact and whose mutual relations to each other are . . . settled jointly by some direct intuition into the ultimate character of the universe. These concepts are:

1. That of the value of an individual for itself.
2. That of the value of the diverse individuals . . . for each other.
3. That of the value of the objective world . . . derivative from the interrelations of its component individuals, and also necessary for the existence of each of these individuals (RM 58).

These statements are the first conclusions to emerge from Whitehead's examination of the structure of rational religion. Whitehead begins by proposing a basic religious predicate and he invites consideration of its applicability to logical subjects which have central positions in the religions of "the civilized world" (RM 61). He is proposing that what rational religions intuit and seek to elucidate is "a character of permanent rightness, whose inherence in the nature of things modifies both efficient and final cause" (RM 60). He is denying that what rational religions intuit and seek to elucidate is "a direct vision of a personal God" (RM 64). In Whitehead's view the critical case for his proposal is Christianity. He argues that while "Christian theology . . . maintains the doctrine of the existence of the personal God as a truth, [it] holds that . . . belief in it is based upon inference. . . and not

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<sup>14</sup> Christian, Meaning and Truth in Religion, op.cit., p. 81f.

[upon] a direct intuition" (RM 61). Whitehead does not attempt to verify the applicability of his proposal. This task is also outside the scope of the present study. What is of immediate interest is that Whitehead names the relevant sources of evidence for testing the applicability of his proposal. These sources are Confucian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, Hindu philosophy and the theology of the Christian churches "which more especially claim the title of Catholic" (RM 62). There is clear textual evidence that Whitehead is seeking to identify a basic religious predicate applicable to those religions "who have rationalized their outlook" (RM 65).

There is an important corollary attached to Whitehead's proposal for the basic religious predicate. It flatly contradicts any interpretation of the role of religion as an evaluation of the worth of the individual in disjunction from the worth "of the objective universe" (RM 59). The linking of human salvation and the salvation of the universe is not merely a phenomenological pattern to be recognized in high religion. It is also, in Whitehead's view, an essential precondition for any rational account of things. Without this interconnection a fundamental disconnection emerges in the nature of things that precludes a coherent and rational grasp of the character of the universe as a whole. It would leave religion "outside metaphysical rationalization" (RM 68).

Whitehead also provides a general characterization of the structure of the answers rational religions provide to the basic religious question, "What is the character permanently inherent in the universe?" Basic religious proposals for answering this question first emerge as intuitions in moments of religious insight and not as doctrinal formulations. The insight receives expression through action, words and art. The

expression is more than an interpretation.

It is creative. It elicits the intuition which interprets it. It cannot elicit what is not there. A note on a tuning fork can elicit a response from a piano. But the piano has already in it the string tuned to the same note. In the same way the expressive sign elicits the existent intuition which would not otherwise emerge into individual distinctiveness (RM 128).

In terms of Whitehead's example most men are like the piano and unlike the tuning fork. Theirs is not a first-hand expression of intuition. They express intuitions that have been called forth by the novelty of expression of a few persons who have articulated original intuitions. Novel intuitions that answer the basic religious question or attempt to answer it are the starting-point for the development of religious dogma (RM 132).

The dogmas of religion are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the religious experience. . . . (RM 57).

. . . . .  
The dogmas are statements of how the complex world is to be expressed in the light of the intuitions fundamental to the religion (RM 133-134).

In Whitehead's view the religious, if they are reasonable, cannot be content with a beautiful vision. "Religion claims that its concepts, though derived primarily from special experiences, are yet of universal validity" (RM 31). If religion is an apprehension of the character inherent in the universe it must insist "on its universality, because it is either that or a passing fancy" (RM 133). It follows that while a religious intuition emerges from a particular moment of insight the truths discerned in that intuition cannot be accurately expressed apart from a consideration of all the other evidence bearing upon the question of the character of the universe. Dogmas are attempts to articulate the

relation of that religious vision to the other relevant evidence.

Having set the stage for the analysis of basic religious inquiry and its relation to metaphysics Whitehead seems to terminate abruptly the generality of his discussion and restrict himself to the articulation of a dogma appropriate to the interpretation of but one answer to the basic religious question concerning the character inherent in the universe. He announces "that there is but one religious dogma in debate: What do you mean by 'God'? . . . This is the fundamental religious dogma, and all other dogmas are subsidiary to it" (RM 66). Without a close consideration of the context this announcement suggests that for Whitehead the term "God" denotes a unique logical subject the apprehension of which is the starting-point for the answer to the basic religious question. The only question in debate would then be a doctrinal question. It would be a disagreement about the appropriate elucidation of one answer to the basic religious question. But the basic religious intuition would be agreed upon. Stated concretely it would mean that Whitehead had concluded that God is the answer to the question of what is the character permanently inherent in the universe. It would also mean that any non-theistic answer to that question had been ruled out. To reiterate, it would mean that Whitehead views God as the answer to the basic religious question and that he is only concerned with the accurate formulation of that answer.

It is my contention that this interpretation is mistaken. It has already been indicated that Whitehead explicitly identifies the starting-point of the religious answer as an intuition and not a dogma (RM 58). It is also clear that Whitehead explicitly denies that God



is an object of direct intuition (RM 64). There is a further piece of relevant evidence. When Whitehead begins to discuss alternative renderings of what he calls "the fundamental religious dogma" it is clear that he is not using the term "God" in any specific sense. The term "God" is stretched to cover concepts that are elaborations of the diverse notions "Nirvana", "Brahman", "the Absolute" and "Yahweh". It is somewhat unconvincing to interpret this panoply of answers as doctrinal variations to a generally agreed upon answer to the basic religious question. The scope of formulations Whitehead includes as possible answers to the question "What do you mean by 'God'?" (RM 66) are so wide that it would make sense to speak of non-theistic formulations of the fundamental dogma concerning "God". In short the term "God" as used by Whitehead in this context does not identify a particular religious answer. I suggest that he is using "God" as a predicate expression. It does not refer to a unique logical subject but is an equivalent for the predicate expression, "the character permanently inherent in the universe".<sup>15</sup>

If this is correct, then when Whitehead says that the fundamental religious dogma in debate is "God" he is simply saying that the fundamental religious dogma in debate is the character permanently inherent in the universe. Whether this interpretation is correct or not one point is clear. Whitehead's use of the term "God" together with his use of the basic religious predicate leave no question that in his view there can be only one true object of religious inquiry. There can be only

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<sup>15</sup>Christian provides a similar analysis of a passage from Paul Tillich, *ibid.*, p. 38, footnote 4.

one character permanently inherent in the universe. But this conclusion is not an invitation to the intolerant expostulation of religious dogmas.

In human nature there is no special organ that infallibly grasps religious truth. "Religious truth must be developed from knowledge acquired when our ordinary senses and intellectual operations are at their highest pitch of discipline" (RM 120). But a general truth may be intuited before it receives "accurate verbal expression" (RM 122). It is in Whitehead's view fundamental to religious inquiry that the supposition be granted "that we know more than can be formulated in one finite systematized scheme of abstractions" (RM 137). The basic religious predicate is that "there is a wisdom in the nature of things, from which flow our direction of practice, and our possibility of the theoretical analysis of fact" (RM 137-138). But at the same time dogmatic formulation is necessary. It is the only way to assure that an insight grasped in a special moment or occasion has relevance beyond that horizon. Since the focus of attention of religious inquiry is the character of the universe itself it is not to be expected that accurate and precise dogmatic systematizations will be easily attained or that they will expose an inherent simplicity at the heart of things. "In the physical world as science advances, we discern a complexity of interrelations. There is a certain simplicity of dominant ideas, but modern physics does not disclose a simple world" (RM 74). In Whitehead's view religious dogmas have failed more often because of extreme simplicity than because of undue complexity. Simplicity in religious dogma has led to overstatement of the applicability of certain notions to the character inherent in the

universe. Overstatement has led to contradictory accounts of the same fact. What is required is a more careful analysis that reconciles contradictory accounts by striking "more deeply into the root of reality" (RM 127). It is impossible to reconcile conflicting accounts apart from "some definite metaphysical way of conceiving the most penetrating description of the universe. Thus rational religion must have recourse to metaphysics for a scrutiny of its terms. At the same time it contributes its own independent evidence, which metaphysics must take account of in framing its description" (RM 76). The goal of the present discussion is to provide suggestions for the explication of this synopsis of the relation of religion and metaphysics. The remainder of this chapter will consider the role of metaphysics within Whitehead's religious inquiry.

## 6. Metaphysics Within the Religious Inquiry

In RM, the role of metaphysics in religion is first introduced in the context of an examination of dogma and the need to fix the sense of terms by reference to some definite metaphysics. But there is a logically prior interaction of his religious inquiry and metaphysics. The meaningfulness of the basic religious predicate is adjudicated by metaphysical considerations and not peculiarly religious evidence. It is a metaphysical question whether it is possible to speak of a "character permanently inherent in the universe". It is a matter of religious inquiry to determine whether that predicate is applicable to "rational religions". Applicability is to be determined by a phenomenological investigation. Whitehead would consider it a cogent criticism if it could be shown that his basic religious predicate does not apply to a logical subject

that is central within one of the high religions. Among the religions Whitehead regards as relevant tests are Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism (RM 61). There is another point where metaphysics enters the religious inquiry. If, as Whitehead claims, the starting-point of religion is an intuition of the character permanently inherent in the universe then that intuition cannot fail to incorporate metaphysical presuppositions. "In so far as we trust the objectivity of the religious intuitions, to that extent we must also hold that the metaphysical doctrines are well founded" (RM 84). It has been clear from the outset that not all high religions are compatible with all metaphysical schemes and vice versa. In this context Whitehead's remark that Christianity is "a religion seeking a metaphysic" (RM 50) is somewhat qualified. Certainly Whitehead would think it very difficult to reconcile Christianity with a metaphysics that denied any possibility of affirming the existence of God.

At the level of dogmatic formulation the relationship of a religion to a metaphysics becomes definite. Implicitly or explicitly a metaphysical interpretation is involved. It is only a question of whether the metaphysics is critically or uncritically appropriated. Virtually nothing can be said about the validity of a religious intuition apart from "some definite metaphysical way of conceiving the most penetrating description of the universe" (RM 76). That religious inquiry cannot proceed without metaphysics does not mean that religious inquiry terminates with the adoption of a metaphysics. It is not a peculiarity of religious inquiry that it "requires a metaphysical backing" (RM 81). In numerous passages Whitehead effectively argues

the importance of metaphysical presuppositions in scientific and historical investigation.<sup>16</sup> The peculiarity of religious inquiry is that its relation to metaphysics is more immediately apparent. Religion seeks to justify its intuition of the character permanently inherent in the nature of things. Without metaphysical backing religious "dogmas are merely pleasing ideas for the purpose of stimulating . . . emotions" (RM 83). Whitehead's account of the necessary introduction of metaphysics into religious inquiry is not understood by him to describe a situation peculiar to his own metaphysical and religious inquiries. It is intended as a general description of how metaphysics enters into a rational religion. At this point Whitehead introduces his own metaphysics "for immediate comparison with the deliverances of religious experience" (RM 87).

If metaphysics is the final court of appeal for adjudicating religious truth (AI 162) then it is important to show that its power of judgment has not been compromised by the acceptance of a specific religious proposal a priori. However, insofar as the metaphysical presuppositions present in the intuitions fundamental to different religious traditions are in conflict it is to be expected that the metaphysics taken as the basis of judgment will deal more favorably with one set of presuppositions than another. In these instances a basic religious disagreement deepens into a basic metaphysical disagreement. It is no longer a question of whether the religious inquiry has dealt fairly with

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AI, 144-146, 154-158; PR 471, 499, 502; SMW 183; MT 154-155.

a religious tradition. It is a question of whether the metaphysics adopted as the basis of the religious inquiry has dealt fairly with an alternative metaphysical rendering of the facts. In the case of Buddhism it is Whitehead's view that its disagreement with other rational religions stems from a radical metaphysical disagreement. The "aims of Buddhism are directed to altering the first principles of metaphysics" (RM 135). It is not apparent that Whitehead regards the divergence among other religious traditions as of such a radical metaphysical nature (AI 161). The point of immediate interest is not whether Whitehead has accurately assessed which religious disagreements have the depth of metaphysical disagreements. The point of immediate interest is that his analysis of religious inquiry does not arbitrarily dismiss high religions whose metaphysical presuppositions conflict with the metaphysics adopted as the basis for judgment in the religious inquiry. The conflict is merely an invitation to a deeper discussion, a discussion of the first principles of metaphysics.

The question that now emerges is whether Whitehead's consideration of the first principles of metaphysics has dealt fairly with divergent metaphysical accounts, particularly those identified with major religious traditions. This question cannot be answered adequately in the present study, but there are at least indications that if Whitehead's consideration of alternative metaphysical schemes is unfair it is not obviously unfair. In Chapter Two of this study William Christian's argument that God is a derivative notion in Whitehead's metaphysics was considered. The crux of that argument is that God is only required in Whitehead's metaphysics if it is

concluded that "some real things have temporal beginnings".<sup>17</sup> That conclusion does not appear to have the status of a necessary truth. "Whitehead does not seem to claim it is a deduction from clear, certain, and sufficient premises; and he does not seem to claim that all its alternatives are absurd. Though there is no doubt he believes it is true".<sup>18</sup> There are significant indications that Whitehead would not arbitrarily rule out metaphysical schemes that deny that real things have temporal beginnings (PR 208). It is noteworthy that nowhere in his account of religious inquiry does Whitehead dismiss the relevance of evidence arising from a consideration of the Buddhist tradition. The passages in which he encourages a cross-fertilization of Christianity and Buddhism occur in RM after the introduction of his own metaphysics into the religious inquiry as a ground for adjudication of religious truth (RM 140). In summary, the introduction of Whitehead's metaphysics into his religious inquiry is not intended and does not appear to compromise the generality of that inquiry. But it does serve to distinguish what elements in a disagreement between religious traditions are a matter of disagreement in "explanatory formulations" (AI 161) and what elements are a matter of disagreement in metaphysical first principles (RM 135).

It now remains to be seen whether acceptance of Whitehead's metaphysics so narrowly defines the range of religious possibilities that acceptance of the metaphysics is a de facto acceptance of one

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<sup>17</sup>Christian, "The Concept of God as a Derivative Notion", op.cit., p. 196.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

religious proposal as the only possible answer to the basic religious question. It is clear that Whitehead himself does not think so. In his own view his metaphysics has only taken into consideration "evidence with a certain breadth of extension throughout mankind" (RM 107). It is characteristic of religions to interpret their fundamental insights "as leading to a more definite knowledge than can be derived from a metaphysic which founds itself upon general experience" (RM 143). Having assessed the validity of the metaphysical presuppositions of a religious insight by metaphysical criteria it is quite appropriate in Whitehead's view to assess other aspects of that insight on the basis of "more special evidence, religious or otherwise" (RM 107). It is clear that on Whitehead's view acceptance of his metaphysics does not involve necessarily the acceptance of any religious view whatsoever, at least at an explicit level. He argues that there is nothing peculiarly religious about the introduction of the concept "God" into his metaphysics. "The concept of God is certainly one essential element in religious feeling. But the converse is not true; the concept of religious feeling is not an essential element in the concept of God's function in the universe" (PR 315-316). The question of the extent to which acceptance of Whitehead's metaphysics determines the validity of a particular religious proposal is examined in the next chapter.

## 7. Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to show that Whitehead is engaged in a general religious inquiry whose purpose is to identify



the sphere of religious activity in human life and to present an analysis of religious inquiry itself. "The peculiar character of religious truth is that it explicitly deals with values (RM 120)" and that it addresses itself to the question of what is the character permanently inherent in the universe. The answer to this question "provides a meaning, in terms of value, for our own existence, a meaning, which flows from the nature of things" (RM 120). While metaphysics determines whether the basic religious question is meaningful, religious inquiry determines what question may be legitimately taken as the basic religious question and it assesses what answers are relevant and what answer is adequate to the basic religious question. It has been argued that Whitehead is presenting a theory of religion applicable only to religions "who have rationalized their outlook" (RM 65). For Whitehead the starting-point for religion is that experience of solitariness that provokes the question, "What in the way of value is the attainment of life?" This question can only be answered in terms of "an apprehension of character permanently inherent in the nature of things" (RM 60). This apprehension provides the foundation for the interpretation of the value of the individual to himself and others and the value of the objective world. While religious concepts may originate in special moments of insight, it is characteristic of religions to proclaim universal validity for their truths. These truths cannot be accurately expressed apart from consideration of all the other evidence bearing upon the question of the character of the universe. The product of the attempt to express accurately religious truths are dogmas. It has been argued that the

"God" does not denote a unique logical subject in the context of RM but is an equivalent for the predicate expression, "the character permanently inherent in the universe". Religion cannot justify its intuition of the character permanently inherent in the universe apart from metaphysical backing. If metaphysics is the final court of appeal for adjudicating religious truth then it is important to show that its power of judgment has not been compromised by the acceptance of a specific religious proposal a priori. It was found that the evidence so far presented does not suggest that Whitehead has adopted a specific religious proposal. However, it is to be expected that any given metaphysics will not adjudicate conflicting metaphysical presuppositions of different rational religions only to find them equally valid. In these instances a basic religious disagreement deepens into a basic metaphysical disagreement. By introducing his own metaphysics into his general religious inquiry, Whitehead does not intend to dismiss high religions whose metaphysical presuppositions conflict with his metaphysics. The conflict is merely an invitation to a discussion of metaphysical first principles. It was noted that there are indications that Whitehead's consideration of alternative metaphysical schemes is far from arbitrary. The final question to be raised was whether acceptance of Whitehead's metaphysics so narrowly defines the range of religious possibilities that acceptance of the metaphysics is in fact acceptance of a single religious proposal. The next chapter considers the extent to which acceptance of Whitehead's metaphysics is the confirmation of a particular religious proposal.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE RELATION OF RELIGIOUS AND METAPHYSICAL INQUIRY

In this chapter the relation of religion to metaphysics is re-examined in light of the proposal that Whitehead's discussion of religion is an analysis of religious inquiry. An attempt is made to distinguish what is clear and what remains problematic about the relation of religion and metaphysics in Whitehead's thought. The following questions will be examined: (1) the extent to which metaphysics is demonstrative of more than an abstract intellectual unity in experience, (2) the extent to which religious inquiry is not co-terminous with metaphysical inquiry, (3) the novel contribution of Whitehead's analysis of religious inquiry, (4) the extent to which this study leaves incomplete and unclear Whitehead's analysis of the relation of religion to metaphysics, and (5) the conclusions that may be drawn from this study.

1. What Does Valid Metaphysics Demonstrate?

In a previous chapter it was noted that William Christian has attempted to analyze Whitehead's metaphysical system strictly from the standpoint of its logical structure.<sup>1</sup> It is a supposition of Whitehead's speculative philosophy "that there is nothing which is

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 54.

absolutely unconnected with everything else".<sup>2</sup> This justifies the construction of a categoreal scheme rather than only a list of sorts of things. It also justifies the use of the paradigm of aesthetic experience for constructing the notion of actual entities. It is Christian's conclusion that Whitehead's metaphysics can demonstrate at most that "there can be an intellectual unification in experience which is something like the unity of an esthetic experience".<sup>3</sup> It can only support the claim for "a unity in thought. The supposition that all things are interconnected in some systematic way does not, of itself, justify . . . going further and saying there is a harmony of being in some other and stronger sense. Yet . . . Whitehead does go further . . . he speaks of a 'Harmony of Harmonies' which is both the basis of morality and the object of religious experience".<sup>4</sup>

Christian appears to be accusing Whitehead of what he himself terms the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness". "This fallacy consists in neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought" (PR 11). He is suggesting that Whitehead has failed to appreciate the abstractness of his own metaphysics when he attempts to postulate on the basis of that metaphysics a "Harmony of Harmonies". Whitehead has considered experience only insofar as it exemplifies categories of thought. He has ignored aspects of actuality which make

<sup>2</sup>Christian, "Some Uses of Reason", op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

a difference to the possibility of a unity of value and purpose but can be successfully ignored when the unity is restricted to intellectual or thought categories. For example, the characteristics of a cat and mouse might suggest a harmonious co-existence for they both exemplify features that may be classed as mammalian. But unification under the genus mammal ignores rather significant nonharmonious features of the interrelation of cats and mice, at least from the point of view of the mice. Christian's analysis is mistaken in two respects. Whitehead does not postulate the existence of a "Harmony of Harmonies" as something capable of metaphysical proof. He explicitly describes it as a notion which requires for its support appeal "to occasions and modes of experience which in some degree are exceptional" (AI 294). He states that in this context he offers nothing "in the nature of proof" but only "suggestions" as to how in the light of his system it is possible to elucidate "somewhat exceptional elements in our conscious experience" (PR 521). This, however, is the minor aspect of Christian's error. In attempting to show that Whitehead has fallen prey to the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" Christian has himself fallen prey to what Whitehead might call the "fallacy of misplaced abstractness". It is a misunderstanding of Whitehead's position to suggest that he would regard the metaphysical aspect of his inquiry as productive of an intellectual unity of experience that did not reflect a more fundamental interconnectedness of things. Central to Whitehead's position is the claim that intellectual modes of experience are derivative of more fundamental modes of experiencing. To reduce Whitehead's metaphysics to an

intellectual unity is to cut it off from the only foundation Whitehead is able to discern for the interconnectedness of things. It is experience in the mode of causal efficacy and not experience in the mode of conceptual analysis that is the bridge whereby the essential connectedness of things is maintained. While Christian's analysis is far from adequate it does serve to raise an important question about the structure of Whitehead's metaphysics that is pertinent to any analysis of the relation of that metaphysics to any religious vision of the character inherent in the universe. It raises the question of the extent to which metaphysics is demonstrative of more than an abstract intellectual unity in experience. In the present inquiry no precise answer to this question has been reached. It is possible, however, to show that Whitehead while claiming that all order is aesthetic order (RM 101) did not believe that the metaphysical evidence justified the postulation of a "Harmony of Harmonies" or was sufficient to prove the existence of God as conceived in the religious traditions. He only felt justified in suggesting that certain religious interpretations were consonant with the metaphysical picture he had presented.<sup>5</sup> In the next section the relevant evidence will be examined.

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<sup>5</sup>I agree, however, with Charles Hartshorne's contention that "Whitehead does offer what might with some qualification be called 'proofs for God,' even though he also declares that 'nothing like proof' is possible". See "Whitehead's Idea of God", *op. cit.*, p. 535. I am only contending that in Whitehead's view, religion claims and perhaps legitimately claims "more definite knowledge than can be derived from a metaphysic which founds itself upon general experience" (RM 143).

## 2. Is Religious Inquiry Co-Terminous with Metaphysical Inquiry

It has been shown that Whitehead thinks that metaphysics is essential within the structure of rational religious inquiry.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that he believes metaphysics should supplant religion nor that he fails to distinguish between religious and metaphysical inquiry. While it is clear that Whitehead does distinguish between religion and metaphysics his explanation is not as clear as might be hoped. In this section, I shall consider two interpretations that I think are misleading simplifications of Whitehead's position and then will elaborate and offer evidence for a third interpretation.

### Religion as a Species of Feeling

In a previous chapter<sup>7</sup> it was noted that R. Das and Victor Lowe conclude that Whitehead emerges "with religious feeling on the one hand, and philosophic ideas on the other, no place being left for theology".<sup>8</sup> This position seems to find textual support. For example: "Religion should connect the rational generality of philosophy with the emotions and purposes springing out of existence in a particular society, in a particular epoch, and conditioned by particular antecedents. Religion is the translation of general ideas into particular thoughts, particular emotions, and particular purposes" (PR 23). It is my contention that Das and Lowe have misapprehended the import of these passages. To say that religion connects the rational generality of philosophy with certain emotions and purposes is not to say that religion

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<sup>6</sup>See above, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>See above, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup>Victor Lowe, op.cit., p. 95.

is only a species of emotion. The preceding analysis<sup>9</sup> of Whitehead's religious inquiry has indicated that Whitehead rejects any reduction of religion to a function of psychological states (RM 119). If religion is to be understood as merely a species of emotion it could readily be cut loose from metaphysical considerations. But this is the exact converse of Whitehead's position. He continually insists that "religious truth must be developed from knowledge acquired when our . . . intellectual operations are at their highest pitch of discipline" (RM 120). A refinement of Lowe's position would be to suggest that religion for Whitehead is not simply emotion but metaphysics plus the emotions required to make abstract metaphysical truths efficacious in concrete daily experience. This appears to be part of the import of the passage quoted above and similar passages can be quoted in support of this position.<sup>10</sup> The difficulty of this position is that it oversimplifies Whitehead's account of the relation of thought to experience. It could be taken to mean that the fundamental unity Whitehead discerns in the nature of things is a unity derivative from intellectual and conceptual experience and that the apprehension of this conceptual unity provokes emotions that are peculiarly religious. Such an interpretation falls prey to what I have termed the "fallacy of misplaced abstractness". It ignores the most fundamental feature of Whitehead's metaphysics, namely the insistence that the primary

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<sup>9</sup> See above, p. 64. See also, SMW, 190f..

<sup>10</sup> RM 31 and PR 23-26.



mode of experiencing is the mode of causal efficacy. "There is no such independent item in actuality as "mere concept". The concept is always clothed with emotion . . . the notion of mere concept, or of mere realization, apart from a relevant emotional derivation, which is its emotional origin, is fallacious" (MT 122). Metaphysical abstractions may serve to emphasize the unity already present in experience but they do not create that unity. Metaphysics brings to explicitness and self-consciousness the sense of the wholeness and interconnectedness of things that is presupposed in the primary experience which lies below reflective analysis. Metaphysics accentuates something which is already there. If metaphysics is efficacious in evoking religious feeling it is because it brings to self-awareness something which has already been experienced. "It cannot elicit what is not there" (RM 128). There is no guarantee, however, that abstractions accurately reflect fundamental experience. They may become separated from the environment that reveals their relevance to the totality of experience. "The degeneracy of mankind is distinguished from its uprise by the dominance of chill abstractions, divorced from aesthetic content" (MT 123). Having considered the difficulties associated with Lowe's interpretation a second proposal will be considered.

#### Religion as a Species of Metaphysics

The proposal to be considered now is that religion is only metaphysics "as developed from the standpoint of the faith or the religious experience of a person or group, rather than from the

standpoint of the minimal common faith or experience of men in general".<sup>11</sup> Support for this interpretation is found in Whitehead's statement that "the doctrines of rational religion aim at being that metaphysics which can be derived from the supernormal experience of mankind in its moments of finest insight" (RM 31). It is clear that a metaphysics derived from religious insight cannot coexist with a conflicting metaphysics derived from the experience of men in general. "It cannot be true that contradictory notions can apply to the same fact" (RM 75). Regardless of its source a metaphysics must be applicable and adequate for the interpretation of all experience. There are not two kinds of metaphysics, one for the religious and one for the irreligious. If metaphysical truths are indeed truths they must apply to the religious and irreligious equally. Insofar as religious inquiry must have recourse to metaphysics, that metaphysics must be generally applicable, or it is not metaphysics at all. This proposal is correct insofar as it is claiming that, while the standpoint of the religious and the irreligious may differ, their metaphysics cannot differ and both be right. What remains to be considered is whether it is correct to say that the religious and irreligious have different starting-points, but insofar as their metaphysical inquiry is successful they will reach an identical conclusion about the nature of things. Whitehead's answer to this question is clearly negative. An important feature of the present study is its discovery that Whitehead

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<sup>11</sup>This quotation is taken from Charles Hartshorne.  
See MVG, p. 73.

distinguishes basic religious questions from basic metaphysical questions. It is possible to engage in a basic metaphysical inquiry which asks the question, "What sorts of things are there?" without engaging in a basic religious inquiry which seeks to discern "What in the way of value is the attainment of life?" While the metaphysical inquiry is possible apart from a religious inquiry the converse is not the case. It is also Whitehead's conclusion that religious answers seek to provide "more definite knowledge than be derived from a metaphysic which founds itself upon general experience" (RM 143). In two senses then religion can be seen to differ from metaphysics. First, it seeks to answer a different basic question. Second, while it is a prerequisite that its answer be consonant with the truths discerned through metaphysics, its answer is more definite as to detail than any answer derived from a general metaphysics could claim to be. In the section that follows evidence from Whitehead will be adduced to support the interpretation that has emerged in the process of criticizing the preceding accounts of the relation of religion and metaphysics in Whitehead's thought.

#### What in Religion Goes Beyond Metaphysics

I have argued that religion in Whitehead's view can be reduced neither to species of emotion nor simply to a form of metaphysics that has a different starting-point than general metaphysical inquiry. In an earlier chapter it was argued that Whitehead is engaged in a general religious inquiry as well as a general metaphysical inquiry. The question that remains to be examined is how and in what sense.

religion affirms more than a general metaphysics can establish. Before attempting to answer this question directly evidence derived from the closing sections of PR and AI will be considered.

At the termination of PR Whitehead sets forth what he terms the final religious problem. It is "the question whether the process of the temporal world passes into the formation of other actualities, bound together in an order in which novelty does not mean loss" (PR 517). It is the question of whether there is any "escape from time in its character of 'perpetually perishing'" (PR 516). Of interest for answering the question addressed in this section is the way in which Whitehead phrases his answer. "In the temporal world, it is the empirical fact that process entails loss: the past is present under an abstraction. But there is no reason, of any ultimate metaphysical generality, why this should be the whole story" (PR 517). What is of interest here is that Whitehead does not regard metaphysics as the final adjudicator of what he has termed "the final religious problem".. The metaphysician can answer the question of whether a religious vision of the nature of "life after death" or the maintenance of the value of an individual life is consonant with metaphysical principles. If it is not consonant with the metaphysical principles, then the metaphysician can reject its postulation as a rational belief. But if it is consonant, the metaphysician qua metaphysician must remain silent. The validity of the religious evidence may be legitimately adjudicated on the basis of more particular evidence than that to be derived from a general metaphysics (PR 521).

I shall now consider briefly Whitehead's introduction of the

notion of a "Harmony of Harmonies" at the termination of AI. It is of particular interest in the present context because it is upon the basis of the postulation of a "Harmony of Harmonies" that Christian finds ground for accusing Whitehead of falling prey to the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness". The first point to be observed is that this phrase does not arise within the context of what strictly speaking could be called a metaphysical discussion. Whitehead is setting forth what he considers to be the essential qualities of civilization. Four of those qualities are readily identifiable. They are: "Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art" (AI 284). But apart from a fifth quality the pursuit of these other qualities "can be ruthless, hard, cruel, and thus . . . lacking in some essential quality of civilization" (AI 284). "We are in a way seeking for the notion of a Harmony of Harmonies, which shall bind together the other four qualities, so as to exclude from our notion of civilization the restless egotism with which they have often in fact been pursued. . . . I choose the term "Peace" for that Harmony of Harmonies which calms destructive turbulence and completes civilization" (AI 285). It is to be noted that the term "Peace" is introduced as a quality of civilization. It characterizes not the universe but the state of mind of those who are civilized. "It is a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some . . . metaphysical insight momentous in its coordination of values" (AI 285). While the sense of Peace is unattainable apart from a metaphysics that does not repudiate the possibility that "fine action is treasured in the nature of things" (AI 274), it is not Whitehead's contention that the "Harmonies of Harmonies" is subject to metaphysical proof. It remains a metaphysical intuition that

goes beyond the evidence arising from "the ordinary, average experience of mankind, properly interpreted" (AI 295). It is a metaphysical notion which rests itself upon an appeal "to occasions and modes of experience which in some degree are exceptional" (AI 294). Whitehead is claiming at one and the same time that the notion of a "Harmony of Harmonies" is not susceptible to metaphysical proof and at the same time is not to be dismissed as mere wishful thinking. It is rather descriptive of an existential appropriation by individuals and civilizations of the conviction "that fine action is treasured in the nature of things" (AI 274).

It is now possible to bring together my interpretation of Whitehead's position on how and in what sense religion affirms more than a general metaphysics can establish. The first point to note is that religion affirms more detail than a general metaphysics can establish. What escapes metaphysics is the concrete particularity of personal experience and the uniqueness of great religious insights whose "originality is the very element in their expression which remains unformularized" (RM 131). "There is a quality of life which lies always beyond the mere fact of life; and when we include the quality in the fact, there is still omitted the quality of the quality" (RM 77). The second point to note is that for Whitehead metaphysics is an ongoing adventure. It follows that religious dogmas--"in the sense of a precise statement--can never be final; it can only be adequate in its adjustment of certain abstract concepts" (RM 126). As the scope of metaphysical understanding grows the dogmatic formulation of religious truth must be adjusted in light of wider knowledge. The religious

intuition if it is indeed a profound insight into the character of the universe will not be funded without residue into one set of metaphysical propositions. "Formulations are the froth upon the surface. Religion insists that the world is a mutually adjusted disposition of things, issuing in value for its own sake" (RM 138). While dogmatic expression is necessary great religious expression calls forth an "intuitive response which pierces beyond dogma" (RM 139).

### 3. Whitehead's Contribution to Religious Inquiry

The present study has not dealt in depth with that issue which is usually regarded as Whitehead's most significant contribution to religious thought, namely his discussion of deity and his criticism of traditional formulations of that concept. Primary attention has been focussed instead upon Whitehead's analysis of religious inquiry itself. This has brought to attention at least three significant contributions of Whitehead to the analysis of religious inquiry.

(1) Whitehead's identification of a basic religious question that is different from the basic metaphysical question in significant logical ways contributes to the clarification of the relation of these types of inquiry.

(2) Whitehead's analysis of the way metaphysics is introduced into a general religious inquiry suggests a means whereby arbitrary dismissal of high religions with conflicting metaphysical presuppositions can be avoided. In these cases the religious inquiry deepens into a consideration of the first principles of metaphysics.

(3) Whitehead's metaphysical analysis provides significant support for the possibility of rational religion in many ways. It provides an

analysis of the nature of things that makes meaningful the basic religious question, "What is the character permanently inherent in the universe?" It provides support for what Whitehead regards as a position fundamental to rational religion, namely "that we know more than can be formulated in one finite systematized scheme of abstractions" (RM 137). It also is highly suggestive for more adequate formulations of answers to more specific religious questions.

#### 4. Summary

At the outset of this study it was suggested that a preoccupation with "God" as the middle term linking religion and metaphysics in Whitehead has overshadowed the relevance of his writing for answering the wider question of the relation of religious inquiry to metaphysical inquiry. At the termination of this study it must be emphasized that no adequate answer can be given to this wider question apart from a more thorough analysis of Whitehead's discussion of God than has been provided in this thesis. The present study has only suggested a different starting-point for the analysis of the relation of religion to metaphysics in Whitehead's thought. It leaves incomplete the task of integrating the proposal that Whitehead's interest in religion is to analyze the structure of religious inquiry itself with all that Whitehead has written on the question of the nature of God. In this section I must limit myself to corrective suggestions against possible misinterpretation of Whitehead's notion of God that this study might seem to invite.

In this study consideration of Whitehead's discussion of God has been limited to God considered from the standpoint of his primordial nature.



In this context he speaks of God as nontemporal (RM 88) but God has a consequent as well as a primordial nature. "God's primordial nature is abstracted from his commerce with 'particulars . . . It is God in abstraction alone with himself. As such it is a mere factor in God, deficient in actuality (PR 50). It must be emphasized that the "nature" are separable only in thought and not in metaphysical actuality. It is primordially necessary that God will be consequent. God in his full actuality is conscious and realizes "the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual, and the consequent nature is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts" (PR 524). Thus God is temporal as well as nontemporal. Charles Hartshorne has concluded "that Whitehead is the first great systematic philosopher who does mean it when he says that God is conscious, i. e. knows the world to be such and such (although it might have been otherwise) and knows that he knows this".<sup>12</sup> This cursory discussion is intended to point to the need for further investigation of the relation of Whitehead's analysis of religious inquiry to Whitehead's analysis of the nature of God. In itself it does not comprise such an investigation.

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<sup>12</sup>Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead and Contemporary Philosophy", op. cit., p. 24.

## CONCLUSIONS

The major finding of this study is that Whitehead is engaged in a religious as well as a metaphysical inquiry. This religious inquiry is not confined to the dogmas of one religion but seeks to outline the logical structure of rational religious inquiry itself. Whitehead tries to show through an examination of phenomenological evidence that the basic question addressed by high religions is "What is the character permanently inherent in the universe?" The religious answer is not a dogmatic formulation but an intuition that settles conjointly the value of individuals for themselves and for each other and the value of the objective universe. But there can be no confirmation of the validity of a religious intuition apart from some definite metaphysical way of conceiving the universe. Thus rational religion must have recourse to metaphysics for a scrutiny of its terms.

Examination of Whitehead's metaphysics reveals that it is not a deductive system based upon self-evident premises. Deduction is a tentative procedure. Before systematization begins and after it has been concluded the speculative philosopher must continue to confront his formulations with the circumstances to which they should apply. Metaphysics is an ongoing adventure in the clarification of thought. Examination of Whitehead's metaphysical inquiry indicates that while religion may serve as a source of suggestions as to how to conceive the ultimate features of everything that is, the final judgment as to what sorts of things there are and how they are interrelated is a metaphysical decision to be made on the basis of metaphysical criteria

and not upon the basis of peculiarly religious evidence. The major instance where the generality of Whitehead's metaphysics might seem to be compromised by the introduction of a religious presupposition is the use of the concept "God" within his metaphysics. It is concluded that God is not introduced into his metaphysics as the logical subject of a particular religious intuition. God is introduced as a derivative metaphysical concept and the question of how this concept is to be understood and whether it refers to anything real is to be determined on the basis of metaphysical considerations.

At the point at which metaphysics is introduced into the structure of religious inquiry the question arises as to whether Whitehead's metaphysics compromises the generality of his religious inquiry. The first point to note is that any rational religion must have recourse to metaphysics to affirm the objective validity of its doctrines. It is clear that a metaphysics will not adjudicate seriously conflicting metaphysical presuppositions of different rational religions and find them equally valid. But this does not mean that serious discussion between conflicting religious traditions is arbitrarily terminated by the imposition of a metaphysics. In these instances a basic religious disagreement deepens into a basic metaphysical disagreement. The conflict is an invitation to a discussion of the first principles of metaphysics. This study also suggests that in his postulation of first metaphysical principles Whitehead does not arbitrarily dismiss divergent metaphysical conclusions.

Given the validity of Whitehead's metaphysics the question arises of how much can be affirmed solely upon the basis of an abstract

general metaphysics and whether religion in any sense can be said to go beyond metaphysics. In Whitehead's view metaphysics does go beyond a mere intellectual unity of experience. The intellectual unity discerned by metaphysics is only a bringing to self-reflective awareness a unity that is already present at a more fundamental level of experiencing. However, in this study no adequate answer is found to the question of the extent to which metaphysics is demonstrative of more than an abstract intellectual unity in experience. It is concluded that in at least one sense religion does go beyond metaphysics. What escapes metaphysics is the concrete particularity of personal experience and the uniqueness of great religious insights whose "originality is the very element in their expression which remains unformularized" (RM 131). Religions claim more definite and concrete knowledge of the nature of things than can be ascertained on the basis of a general metaphysics. Given that these claims are consonant with the conclusions of metaphysics, it is appropriate to assess these more detailed claims on the basis of more special evidence, religious or otherwise (RM 107).

This thesis has found sufficient evidence to conclude that Whitehead is engaged in a general religious inquiry whose purpose is to identify the sphere of religious activity in human life and to present an analysis of religious inquiry itself. The introduction of metaphysics into that inquiry has been examined in some detail. A partial answer has been suggested to the question of the degree to which religion may be said to go beyond truths discerned in a general metaphysics. The precise nature of the relation of this analysis of

religious inquiry to Whitehead's fully developed discussion of the notion of God is a topic awaiting further exploration as is also the question of the degree to which Whitehead's metaphysics may be considered demonstrative of more than an abstract intellectual unity of experience.

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